The Anxiety of Educators: Seminars on Psychoanalysis

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Part I: The Anxiety of Educators

The Anxiety of Educators[1]

1. What Cannot Be Taught

A question posed on December 22nd, 1978, from Jacques Lacan: "how does one go about teaching what cannot be taught?" This question occurred approximately forty-one years after Sigmund Freud's popular statement about the three impossible professions of psychoanalysis, governing, and educating. In his 1937 essay "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," Freud wrote that "it almost seems as if analysis were the third of those 'impossible' professions in which one can be sure in advance of achieving unsatisfying results." We might have been led to conclude that analysis remains in common with the other two had it not been for Freud's qualification that "it almost seems as if …" which is not equivalent to "it is true that …" since the former invokes a semblance of commonality rather than an equivalence. In fact, the statement shows how far-removed analysis was thought to be from governing and educating.

In that same essay Freud portrayed the analyst at times almost as if he were a teacher. He wrote that "it is reasonable to expect an analyst, as part of his qualifications […] that in certain analytic situations he can act as a model for this patient and in others as a teacher." He didn't indicate that the analyst would engage in academic mimicry but that his teaching would emerge from within "certain analytic situations." A suitable reformulation of the prior question

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[1] This is a gently edited transcription of a seminar led in the Comparative Humanities program at Habib University (Karachi, Pakistan) on May 30th, 2024.

about what cannot be taught might therefore be: "what is possible of teaching with respect to psychoanalytic experience?" This is not only a suitable reformulation of the question, but also a properly psychoanalytic one because it does not eschew the impossibilities foundational to its experience. In any case, I see something like a hopefulness in this question from Lacan, even though it's a question that he asked as he approached the last few years of his life. There is a hopefulness in a question of the possibility of thinking beyond the insularity of the clinical setting.

He was not content to remain at the limit of what doesn't work or make sense. He asked a question concerning possibility. In fact, I discovered only recently that Lacan did not shy away from deploying this word "possible" throughout his teaching, and not only to explore Aristotelian or ancient Greek philosophy. He took an interest in the philosophical and functional value of possibility while he was also developing his own psychoanalytic school. It was the mid-1960s, while he was leading his 11th seminar on *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.* And in 1964, Lacan's "Founding Act," a short text which you can easily find online, inaugurated his school with the following statement: "I hereby found, as alone as I ever have been in my relation to the psychoanalytic cause, the *Ecole Française de Psychanalyse* …" In 1967 he shifted from this lonely act, this promise of a possibility, toward a proposition made within a society. It was a proposition to establish a psychoanalytic device known as the "pass." It is in this later document that he used the word "possible."

From 1964 to 1967. From the lonely founding act to its social realization, there was the emergence of a possibility. He used the word favorably when referring to this "pass"

because he believed that he discovered an instrument for the transmission of psychoanalytic teaching that remained as close as possible to the "cutting edge of psychoanalytic experience." I'll quote a few words from his proposition:

> The psychoanalyst derives his authorization only from himself. This principle is inscribed in the original texts of the School and is decisive for its position. This does not exclude the *possibility* that the School provides a guarantee that an analyst has come out of its training. The School may do this on its own initiative.

It is almost as if this statement forms a bridge from psychoanalytic experience to its necessary realization and defense within a social group. Of course, this hasn't stopped most analysts from gaining lessons from other institutes, or even from unsubscribing entirely from any of them to become a bit like Diogenes; unhinged, suspended within insular satisfaction and indifferent to the social order. Possibility is on the side of the social order. This, precisely, is a point that I've only discovered now, after a period of wandering around in this vocabulary. Lacan added, within *l'Etourdi*: "there is no universal that does not reduce itself to the possible."

The word "possible" or "possibility" occurs multiple times within the proposition from Lacan, but not at all within his founding act. Each time the word was invoked it was embedded within overarching statements concerned with the necessity of safeguarding the impossible profession of psychoanalysis. This, precisely, is the function of the school and the product of its teaching. I take as my orientation that Lacan was actively constructing the possibilities necessary for each one to face up to the contingent consequences of

their own psychoanalytic experience. Lacan's preference for the possible perhaps even led him to state that the goal of psychoanalysis was never to cure or educate but to produce psychoanalysts. In fact, in my estimation, psychoanalysis is more interested in what cannot be cured—that which is impossible to cure—rather than what can be cured.

The psychoanalyst is one who inhabits a social bond known as the analyst's discourse. It is a discourse that is neither universal nor particular but for each one, in the singular. I will return to some of this momentarily, but for now I simply want to summarize what I've said a moment ago: the psychoanalytic device known as the pass made it possible for each one to transmit something of their psychoanalytic experience to a society. And then there is the real miracle: that a society could possibly recognize it. There is another passage in the Lacanian orientation, in fact there are many, which caught my eye recently while scribbling some notes for today. It is from a text by Jacques-Alain Miller titled "Psychoanalysis in Close Touch with the Social:"

> [So much] would have been impossible if we still had as our reference the fossilized concept of the setting, understood only as the consulting room of the practitioner exercising in a private practice. Psychoanalysis does not depend on the setting, but on the discourse, that is, on the installation of the symbolic coordinates by someone who is an analyst, and whose quality as an analyst does not depend on the location of his consulting room, nor the nature of his clients, but rather on the experience he is engaged in. […] There is an analytic place possible in institutions.

So, on the one hand, there is the lonely psychoanalytic experience, and, on the other hand, there is the social bond, or what Lacan called discourse. Lacan said it like this: "discourse is what constitutes a social bond." The two, experience and social bond, converge as a possibility within the analyst's discourse. The analyst is situated within a discourse, not a clinic or any other setting. This means that there is no reason to reject the possibility of analysts within the university. However, we would not expect them to offer therapy aimed at establishing the well-being of the student or the institution, nor would he transmit knowledge about psychoanalysis. He would be aimed at making spoken interventions. I have found that many people are surprised to learn that psychoanalysis is not a discourse of silence and listening but of effective interpretation oriented by the question of subjectivity. The analyst speaks through subjective effects. Yet, to be clear, there are obstacles for this within the university that make it impossible for us to conduct our work as analysts.

Lacan spoke boldly about the antipathy of university and analytic discourses. However, he also added, late in his teaching, that something can be refreshed when comes up against its own impossibility. Actually this statement remains a bit of an enigma for me. It's not as clear as it seems. Firstly, it is unclear if this is a critique or if it is an attitude of possibility. The latter is certainly possible since he said of it when his psychoanalytic teaching was entered into the university. He even said that he was offering a "positive report," which would allow the "experiment to continue," namely the possibility of psychoanalysis in the university. But with the proviso: "so long as it has the freedom to do so, if ever it gets restricted, then out of the university!"

Secondly, it is a puzzle for me because Lacan's statement about 'university discourse rubbing up against the impossible' seems to presume that it is a discourse that is itself not reducible to impossibility, that has not merged with the discourse of science and capitalism. Yet at other times Lacan had already intimated that the university, science, and capitalism are not necessarily opposed to one another.

In fact, these are two different points of departure. On the one hand, 'university discourse' confronts impossibility, and, on the other hand, 'university discourse' is itself 'impossible.' What is 'impossibility?' Lacan defined it in various ways, but we would be safe to define it as what doesn't make sense or work. It persists, perhaps even repeats. In this conception, university discourse interrogates impossibility only to return itself to a prior consistency of knowledge, refreshed. It explains why so many dissertations used to accumulate in the appropriately named "stacks" of university libraries, accumulating dust. It's not quite like that anymore since paper has given way to bits of energy that travel at the speed of light. Moreover, it's not quite like that anymore because dissertations are also now out plowing the fields, vibrating woofers, or providing verbiage for freshly minted policy documents.

2. We Are All Mad

It's always possible that we are all mad.

It would be helpful to define the scope of madness as delusion. Lacan put it this way: "we are all mad, that is, delusional." According to Miller, with this statement, which stands isolated within all of Lacan's teaching, he was trying to dignify madness. The university has perhaps not aligned

itself with this orientation though there are corners where depathologization and neurodiversity have taken hold. It's not *that*. Lacan's statement generalized madness within the domain of the social bond, it is the madness of the universal. Truthfully, we enjoy our meanings, and often so much that we do so quite stubbornly.

[Some laughter from the back of the room]

The fact that we can enjoy them in ways that are at odds with others can seem a bit funny to us, and, at other times, irritating.

On the one hand, some of my communist friends are intent on instituting … what? Universal madness! There are others who would rather withdraw into distinctive groups, segregating from others into their caves of madness. I remember a song from a communist punk band during the 1990s, the lyrics were "Let's all share a dream under the communist moon." The problem is that some of us who are influenced by the dissolution of 'grand theory' in sociology haven't made it any further since we prefer that only some share the dream.

The "some," which is not the "for all," designates the madness of fraternity, which we can even find today in those spaces that I am tempted to call "encampusments." It's a neologism. In fact, an article published yesterday said it plainly: "are the encampments places of learning?" It's always possible that we are all mad, except that some of us are equally so. I note with interest that Lacan's question concerned how "one" can teach, in the singular. It was a teaching that would neither be within the universal nor its complement, the particular. It's a singular teaching, and what is singular is not particular to some. I'll leave this topic

in suspense for now, without rejecting the possibility that the classroom be thought of in the singular: but this latter possibility would require that we absolve ourselves of this impossible 'common-sense' sociology which isolates 'individual' and 'social group.' The modern topic of the individual and the group is not a starting point, it is not a foundation, and it cannot provide an orientation. An orientation might allow us to move beyond the contemporary sociologists, especially Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, who have always attempted to overcome the so-called 'absurd opposition of individual and society.' This has only led them to have the individual absorbed by their environment, each in their own way, through practice or habitus. That's the problem with structuralism, and it's not clear that its American rendition, post-structuralism, has done any better.

What Lacan said was as follows: "[Freud] thought that all is but a dream and that everyone is mad, that is, delusional. This is indeed what the very first step in the direction of teaching demonstrates." Freud's teaching tended toward the generalization of madness. I'll provide you with an abridged proof by demarcating a period spanning approximately forty-one years, beginning with *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899. Keep in mind that this was the text that introduced the madness of dreaming (as a consequence of the madness of his *Scientific* Psychology) a possibility that occurs only when the defenses are lowered and satisfactions heightened. In other words, dreams concern the meaningful satisfactions elaborated by the dream-work within the sleeping state. It even brought Freud to claim that "the madman is the dreamer, awake." This would be the compass that Freud follows for the next several decades.

For the remainder of his teaching, he was really asking: "to what extent are waking satisfactions permitted without having to institute fresh repressive measures?" It is a question concerning the transposition of dream madness into the domain of waking life. In other words, it is about waking satisfactions.

Next, Freud began to analyze symptoms, which he found to be satisfactions passing through the body during the waking state, without repression. This definition emerges within his 1926 essay "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety." During each phase of his teaching, he was observing the space where madness confronts an impossible obstacle. In the classic dream-work, it was the so-called "navel of the dream," which is an absolute obstacle to any interpretation. During the later period, it was the elaboration of a response to Otto Rank's theory of "Birth Trauma," which ruptures our memory system. It was also there in his analysis of symptoms, where the symptom absolutely resists interpretation. During each iteration of his teaching, he maintained the possibility of constantly examining these 'holes.'

What happened next?

He explored the satisfactions of groups, particularly in his theories of sublimation, jokes, and creative writing. We cannot claim that Freud was a Victorian thinker of repressive sexuality because so much of his work demonstrates that he was a prophet of the 'sex positive' society. The last period of Freud's teaching arrives into a world structured by historical mythologies that he would interpret casually, as if they were elements within a waking dream. Freud used the same tools as the dream-work to decipher these mythological meanings. It shows us the full

measure of his interest in the meaningful satisfactions of waking life. He attempted to go as far as possible in this direction. During waking life, our lowered defenses and heightened satisfactions can give rise to a madness, which can also become the source of our discontents in culture. This is no less true of his analysis of social groups in 1921, within his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. For example, Freud reasoned that individuals in the group are animated by satisfaction, or what a French sociologist named Emile Durkheim called 'collective effervescence': "a social group shows us [that individuals can suddenly have] weaknesses of intellectual ability, a lack of emotional restraint, an incapacity for moderation and delay, an inclination to exceed every limit …."

I wouldn't claim that Lacan followed an entirely different path during his forty-so years of teaching between the 1940s and 1980s. In this, he remained Freudian. For example, Lacan's earlier formulations led him toward his "unconscious structured like a language" which promoted classical interpretive techniques on the part of the analyst. Next, he foregrounded the symptom as a site of waking satisfaction while emphasizing its social utility. Finally, during the last years, he turned toward 'myth,' a word which suddenly populated his discourse alongside that other word, a much better one, which I've now just mentioned: "discourse." The word myth is like a key for me. It allows me to unlock discourse as 'madness,' except that, unlike the analytic discourse, each believes that it is the truth. Moreover, each presents itself as the 'norm,' which makes madness *norm-ill* [normal].

Lacan didn't use the word "myth" synonymously with "mytheme," since his objective wasn't anymore the

"unconscious structured like a language," a linguistic substratum of the world. Perhaps this was the position of the Cultural Semiologist Roland Barthes, who erroneously believed that myth was simply a type of "language robbery." Barthes held firm, like Noam Chomsky and others tried to do for a while, to language as a universal or common structure. In other words, it was thought of as a general structure.

Personally, I'm not at all inclined to believe that myth involves any theft whatsoever. On the contrary, it seems to reveal the passageway through which one could believe—that is the possibility, or not—of being duped by an arbitrary pairing of satisfaction with meaning. Nothing of our enjoyment is ever truly robbed. I found a fascinating passage from Lacan's early teaching, from his *Ecrits,* written in 1946: "madness is experienced entirely within the register of meaning." It is like a lifelong compass for Lacan. It could be read alongside a statement made in his last period: "the unconscious is precisely the hypothesis that we do not dream only when we are asleep."

3. Lacan's Sociology

I return to the question of the Lacanian "School." The school is not without its version of the "course" or the "semester." It is also not without its mode of social organization. It is a social bond whose relationship to knowledge is like a whirlwind, one with a constant sabotaging of various group effects. If I were to provide a pedagogical and political axiom it would be this: neither hierarchy nor fraternity! It's my anarchist pedagogy, but only because it's firstly psychoanalytic. For each theme of study, a singular invention could be recognized (or not) by the

institution; recognized not for its utility or meaning, but for its desire to pursue the contours of this impossible endeavor toward which one's compass has been set. Moreover, I admire a classroom no longer obliged to follow the norm-illization [normalization] time; one no longer inclined to iron-out the wrinkle of any logical unfolding of a teaching pursues to its own logical time.

There is a moment of understanding, but I'm convinced that it doesn't occur within the classroom. It occurs after a moment of impact, a moment which the normal model cannot do anything but sabotage.

Why couldn't the time of the classroom be punctuated by an impact when it is most likely to resonate? For each interval of time, a punctuation at a of resonance, when a satisfaction and meaning no longer form a couple, so that a new possibility can be carried outside into the field. It wouldn't be all that difficult to install the provisions necessary for a moment of impact, scandalous as it would be for the university discourse and all that is now common to the classroom and its function within wider society. Its effect would nonetheless be undeniable. It requires a few teachers, resolute in their desire, and whose training, overflowing from an experience within the impossible labyrinths of thought, continuously push them to make a mess of things. Afterall, what is the aim of teaching? Perhaps it has nothing to do with the well-being of students or wider society, nor with the transmission of knowledge or skills—unfortunately also referred to as 'know-how'—or even with advancing the interests of an 'it works.' That is all possible. But it seems to me that our profession could be better served by the installation of the very function which we are forced to constantly put into question: the aim of a teaching.

Perhaps psychoanalysis remains a possible space of refuge against the pressures that now threaten any possible teaching within the university. Lacan's teaching provides an orientation, but he refused to give it to us in the form of a pill. It remains forever unfinished, raw, and it often introduces large margins of misunderstanding. He changed his position frequently, even during the same session; resituating himself with respect to what he thought he knew. In doing so, he reinvigorated his field and kept knowledge in movement, maintaining the place from which this movement is made possible: an impossible hole. Possibility gets off the ground by the fact that something is no longer written in advance. This practice led Lacan toward many moments of clarity. Unfortunately, some of these have become Lacanian aphorisms prevalent among internet bedroom philosophers, many of which have settled into well-worn political, pedagogical, and philosophical treatises.

I will summarize: Lacan's teaching was of boundless possibility. He described his own teaching in the following way: "what I trace in front of you are the very tracks around which I ask questions of myself, vaguely; my thoughts wander before things eventually become clear." In other words, you will not find a place where meaning settles in Lacan's teaching in relation to other areas of his teaching. It doesn't mean that his teaching doesn't hold itself together, because it does, since it was always oriented, like Freud's, by a psychoanalytic compass. This is what is called an orientation by a cause.

There is life pulsating in every statement. He was animated by a question aimed at his own impossible profession. He wasn't moved by the cult of 'whatever works,' like the pragmatists who gain ground every day within the university,

nor was he propelled by the discourses of school-masters intent on conveying prefabricated knowledge as if through the radio transmitter to a passive audience (i.e., the "banking" model).

It was during the uprisings of the late 1960s in France that he truly became a sociologist in the act. His founding act established the basis. But first of all, he needed to recognize himself as excluded from the university discourse which preceded him. It was easy because his own dedication to teaching led him to become excommunicated from that discourse, from the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA). To be very clear, he was excommunicated from that society because of a teaching that led him to take seriously what I've been calling the 'moment of impact,' or what is more commonly referred to as the 'variable length session.'

The IPA remained convinced that the proper path was to separate the training of teachers from the experience promoted by teaching, that is, the experience of psychoanalysis. The way they accomplished it was to sustain an initiatory society upheld by gatekeepers who standardized the practice by governing the internal knowledge of the field. On the other hand, Lacan was focused, even during his seminars, on the problem of the rise of comrades or fraternities. The former was a social bond based upon the principle of initiation within a social bond while the latter was based upon segregation between social bonds. His school offered a model of social organization that was neither hierarchical nor horizontal, but a whirlwind. This is how Lacan refreshed the Freudian field. And he wasn't afraid to pull the rug out from the entire thing to start again

from nothing if it was not as close as possible to the cutting edge of psychoanalytic experience.

By the way: that's exactly what he did in the 1980s when his students began to equate the school with Lacan. He announced the dissolution of his school. One of his prized colleagues said to him, which I paraphrase: "But Lacan, the school, it's you." She could have also said that it was a symptom of Lacan. I paraphrase his response: "there's one problem with that. It is *I* who dissolves this school." To the surprise of everyone, then, he set them free again to face up to their own psychoanalytic desire, to refresh and re-energize themselves in relation to a cause worth defending. A pile of people turned to Lacan, to follow him, and he insisted that he would never make a "whole" out of them.

There are many ways to pull the rug. Hence, a modest step forward: return to foundations and pull the rug. I hesitate to mention it, but even Jacques Derrida tried to show us that this is always possible, in any discourse. Those texts and traditions that now inspire the comrades around the world are based upon yesterday's theories, which have become ossified, taken-for-granted, and consistent with the environment. We already know very well what Marx meant by commodity fetishism and alienation. We are perfectly attuned to Giyatri Spivak's theory on the subaltern. It's about time that we as teachers stop knowing it so well.

Miller said of Lacan that he was "always reformulating, remobilizing, and he never said 'it's ready' about his thinking at any point." Why couldn't our classroom produce a whirlwind of meaning? I have a question: "where is 'meaning,' from the perspective of the contemporary classroom?" I'll ask it another way: "what is the function of the classroom today, if any, in relation to the world which

surrounds it?" Does the classroom consist with the 'world,' as in the topology of a sphere? Or could the classroom be conceived as a 'hole' in the world, presenting us with a toric-world that spins around?

These are questions that Marshall McLuhan was increasingly led toward during the later part of his life. He didn't exactly follow the path of topology, but he said in the 1970s that "we live in a new environment in which all of the answers are outside of the school-room. […] If the answers are outside, why not put the questions inside? And why don't we set up a dialogue between outside and inside?" It's a topological question. McLuhan could not have conceived of a 'hole,' since, for him, it was always covered by his question marks. I've gone looking for 'holes' in McLuhan's thinking and all I could find were missing conceptions of the 'hole,' which shows the madness of McLuhan's scholarship. He was interested in the difference of 'inside' and 'outside' according to the vantage-point of teachers. He saw the outside world as mad but could not recognize the madness also of what's inside.

Today it is the scientific discourse, that is what Lacan sometimes called it, that marches straight into the classroom. It's difficult because the university discourse was often thought as a discourse of possibility rubbing up against impossibilities. The scientific discourse is, on the other hand, a discourse of impossibility, though it certainly has its insights, such as formulae and schemata. The classroom is a space increasingly occupied by the strange convergence of capitalism, science, and pragmatics. Here, the impossible rubs up against discourse: it is what never ceases to not write itself. You likely already know that pragmatism was born in the United States, and that it introduced a disruption into

epistemologies of truth by boldly claiming that one should evaluate a truth according to its effects or consequences. The problem with the pragmatic classroom is that it increasingly topologizes a sphere, suturing the 'inside' and 'outside.' In such cases, we lose ourselves as subjects into the environment since the interior and exterior become continuous, without boundary.

As the university goes marching outside to the civil society partners, toward the promotion of engaged citizenry, and so on, those outside elements also come marching inside. And we lose the space from which any subjective question could have ever been sustained. In other words, instead of brushing up against impossibilities, the discourse becomes devoured by them. What's more is that students no longer seem to bring questions with them into the classroom. It's not nostalgia speaking today, but I do bring a prophecy: the rapid disappearance of the question within the classroom. A question is only possible from the standpoint of subjective desire, which means that something of satisfaction had to go missing for the question to be raised. Nothing was stolen here. This is the precondition for any interrogation of masters, whether they be from the school, political establishment, or, why not add, colonial order. This new environment, which seems to me to be impossible, points toward exactly what it was that Lacan foresaw as the push of scientific discourse. He said that it would cause a "relaxation of the university discourse."

Perhaps what is relaxed is the question. If students already know everything, the professor is no longer the one who is supposed to know. This is paradoxically the triumph of university discourse since it has realized the very impossibility through which it has always been animated, but

it has also, consequently, brought students to the point of certainty. The student no longer comes with doubt but with certainty into the classroom. Moreover, it marks an intensity and qualitative shift in our contemporary discontents. It is the student who is now an expert of 'lived experience.' And, what's more, the new pedagogies shift students to 'this' or 'that' place on the discouragingly named 'field trips' to special regions, monuments, museums, or communities. Those places are also brought inside of the classroom, into our appropriately named 'd-labs' and 'playgrounds.' I encourage you to read last week's *New York Times* where an article boasted that museums are now shifting inside of university campuses in America, seeking refuge. The university is devouring what's outside by way of knowledge and artifacts.

Learning through 'doing' and 'service,' as in makerspaces, internships, and design thinking has now gone mainstream. Educational platforms promote the free reign of insular satisfaction, worlds of insular meaning where each can say whatever they say—I wouldn't say that they state what they desire to say, since today's world is much more Buddhist than we are willing to admit—and be whatever they claim to be. It is the merging of satisfaction with meaning, permitted within the classroom without any requirement of fresh repressive measures. Incidentally, the buzz on social media for the last two weeks concerns an exchange between Giyatri Spivak and a student at the Delhi university, JNU. Spivak scolded the student for speaking without proper formalities. In fact, Spivak insisted on a common domain of satisfaction and meaning, one that would be "for all," or universal. What is critiques colonialism here remains a type of madness of the universal. Here, once again, we see the

confrontation of the time between the universality of discourse and its impossibility.

4. University Discourse and the Body

I want to move toward some concluding thoughts, which are not at all formulated or reasonably argued. I hope that I've shown you some explanation for the claim that I have been sustaining for many years, namely that we now dream outside of ourselves. I was surprised to learn just yesterday that Marshall McLuhan already made this claim, which for the last seven years I had thought was my own. Except, I would add, it is knowledge in the form of information which now constitutes our environment, surrounding us in a world that is spherical, by which I mean without bounds. We swim in the boundarylessness of our environment. Recently, an expert on artificial intelligence, here at the Aga Khan University, asked his audience the following question: "how many of you actually make use of artificial intelligence on a daily basis?" A few hands were raised. It was a common-sense question aimed at a supposedly common-sensical audience. But did not the question already limit the scope of its answer? It presumed in advance that we are separated from our media, and that media is not at all constitutive of the environment. It began from this assumption.

Perhaps what we require is a refresher on media theory. How can we explore the consequences of the claim that artificial intelligence is neither gadget nor tool, but environment or field? In other words, how can we do away with this stubborn thesis concerning the 'utility' of media? McLuhan famously said that we shape our tools, and our tools shape us. It offers a perspectival shift from media as utility toward media as determinative structure. A place from

which to nonetheless begin might be the recent anxiety of educators. It is an emerging anxiety. I cannot hear anything but the anxiety of educators ever since the emergence of artificial intelligence and the chatbot. It signals something impossible about our profession. It is an anxiety that would be better approached by admitting the question that it forces us to ask: what are the aims of education? This anxiety also keeps slipping toward anger, which is an emotion we expect when the little pegs don't fit into the little holes: students are plagiarizing, constantly cheating, and so on. That has the convenience of absolving us of our question, and it provides us with the advantage of allowing us to return to the pedagogy of paper.

It emerged long after the anxiety of scientists, which Lacan forewarned in the 1970s. It is akin to the anxiety of any impossible profession. I quote Lacan: "there is something Freud didn't talk about because it was taboo for him, namely the scientist's position. It too is an impossible profession, but science doesn't yet have the slightest inkling that it is, which is lucky for science. Scientists are only now beginning to have anxiety attacks." It is an anxiety that signals something impossible, outside of discourse, which doesn't mean that it's not effective since it has obviously produced mutations in the university discourse. Moreover, it has done so through its gadgets, even those which allow us to move from science to fiction, as in the artificial intelligence chatbot.

This shift from the university as 'possible' toward its impossibility brings panic. Are innovations in the classroom happening faster than we can keep up with them? I quote Andrew McLuhan, grandson of Marshall, who said recently

to our students here in Pakistan that "innovation moves at the speed of light, but regulation at the speed of paper."

There is one solution which the classroom has to its advantage, so long as it keeps at least one foot in the world of paper, and it serves as a temporary plug in the innovation-machine that threatens the classroom: it is the body. The body is not much different from a sheet of paper, and this is a fact that I can prove simply by showing you some of my tattoos. But the hologram of the body, which was accelerated by the television—our first out-of-body experience—removes the possibility for teaching. The body which sits in my zoom classroom, with thoughtful furrowed brows, thinking, on loop every fifteen minutes, has forfeited the possibility for thought. It is why the body is a precondition for possibility and for teaching. This is the lesson that I am taught by the experience of those patients and new social movements who go to great lengths to believe in their body, no matter what the stakes. It is a new struggle that is sometimes brought to the clinic: the trans body. They teach me about the impossible because they keep me on my toes, always forcing me to gather the courage to rise-up and face this cold new environment.

I'll stop at these unfinished thoughts since they might perhaps orient me toward a third possible visitation to this university, Habib, and its hopeful comparative humanities major.

Existential Threat[2]

1. Signifier is a Sign

I want to speak to you about this signifier, "existential threat." This signifier wasn't heard, it was read, in an email invitation that was sent to me by the director of your program, and it was enough for me to take note of it and to realize that I'd heard it before, and not only once. For those of us who are within disciplines touched by semiotics, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, and so on, we like to call everything a signifier. It's something we do as a shorthand, as if we are trying to isolate the function of speech and the field of language as central.

Yet, this phrase, "existential threat," is most assuredly not a signifier, unless we first admit that it is a sign. Why don't I begin here, with this question: what distinguishes a signifier from a sign?

2. Three Modalities of the Signifier

Jacques Lacan maintained that the signifier is a sign. He repeated this enough for us to consider it a constant in his teaching. Yet, he would also claim that the signifier is distinct from the sign. So, how are we to make sense of these claims?

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[2] This is a gently edited transcription of a talk given at the Comparative Humanities Board of Studies, Habib University (Karachi, Pakistan), in May of 2025.

In his third seminar, in the early 1950s, Lacan introduced three modalities of the signifier.

First, the signifier is taken as a sign, with the example statement: "there is no smoke without fire" or, put more simply, "where there's smoke there is fire." The smoke and the fire are in effect tethered to one another in language, the smoke being an expression of the fire, and, linguistically speaking, an extension of it.

You would not expect to see a fire in some other part of the world if the smoke is being witnessed here in Pakistan. Or to be a bit more provocative, I would say that if the smoke is in Pakistan, why would you go looking for fire in the United Kingdom? In fact, you can only do so if the sign is taken as a signifier, that is, if you are dealing with an event that once happened, but one that is now difficult to trace because something went missing. I'm speaking about the colonial history of Pakistan, and the expropriation of wealth. At this point, we find ourselves having to make a case, and we can dedicate a lot of words to proving the case. It keeps the publishing houses and the universities in business.

In a later seminar, Lacan had discussed the "fall of the signifier into the sign." He continued, "As a psychoanalyst, it is by the sign that I am warned. If it signals to me something that I have to treat then I will have to find a way, through the logic of the signifier, to break the lure of the sign."

Second, there is the signifier as a trace, like a footprint in the sand. The object, or, if you like, the referent, has gone missing, but an impression has been left behind. If you are alone with your partner on vacation on a beach, and you lose your partner: perhaps you will notice the footprints in the

sand. I don't see why you wouldn't follow them. They will bring you back to the object, which is not far removed from what it has left behind. There is something of a separation from the object from the sign but that separation is not so distant, since you can refer to the object in some way. You can see that its impression leaves something referring to the object which has been lost.

Finally, third, there is the signifier as a signifier, that is, as pointing at another signifier. The signifier is not the mark of the sign's absence, as in a trace. It is not at all pointing at an object, and not even one that has gone missing. It replaces that object with a signifier, so it points at another signifier, since the object is lost without any trace. It is quite the thing, in fact, to be trapped inside of language in this way: signifiers pointing at other signifiers. It implies that the objects—let's call a spade a spade, the first object is supposed to be the mother—has been exchanged for signifiers. You can never again locate that lost object. Instead, you chase these signifiers for the rest of your life, expecting them to provide you with something to make up for the lost object.

It was on this basis of the third dimension, the signifier pointing at another signifier, that Lacan was able to locate this elusive category which, in the humanities as in psychoanalysis, we call "subject." He famously claimed that a signifier is what represents a subject for another signifier, since the subject is what goes missing, as an object within language. It is tempting to state that the subject introduces a crisis into representation, which is a modern claim, except that the subject is also the very mainspring of representation: it is because the subject is missing from language that it must only be represented. It is even for this reason that the subject can almost convince himself that he is a psychoanalyst, or a

professor. Except that he can never quite be convinced and so must continually renew the linguistic game through various maneuvers.

3. Existential Crisis is a Sign of the End of the World

But I have said that the "existential crisis" is a sign. I would even go so far as to say that it's a sign of the end of the subject's relationship with the world. It's a sign of the end of the world.

The signifier, being one modality of the sign, either is or is not worth believing in. For psychotics in the clinic, belief of this nature is missing, since, in every case, the signifier is often reduced to the effect of a sign. Hence, for the paranoid psychotic, a footprint in the sand is not a sign that anything is missing because it is flooded with meaning. It is like water rising from beneath the sand. The signifier as symbolic is missing for the psychotic and so gets displaced into the real. As for the neurotic, the signifier is there, but only because he believes in it, though he remains in denial about it. He does not accept that he believes in it. The obsessional neurotic believes that there is or was someone who has stolen something from him, his satisfaction. He believes that there was someone to whom he owes a tremendous debt. He cannot seem to locate that person. Nor ever pay off the debt. So, he moves through language in search of an answer.

To say that there is 'no smoke without fire' is to say that smoke is tethered to fire, in a way. In fact, as a sign, it says, essentially, that the fire continues through and into the smoke: fire→smoke. For his part, Lacan put it in this way during his final teaching: "the real continues into the

imaginary." You can write it: real→imaginary. You can find this statement in his 24th seminar. Clinically, it was discovered by Freud in the concept of the 'pleasure-ego.' This was the domain of the ego, of the imaginary 'thing' which we take as reality, that projects aspects of the internal world, of the drives even, into perception and reality. Moreover, he found, long before this, that there can be an introjection or conversion of environmental stimulus into bodily effects through obscene symptoms. It's a strange continuity, this ego, since its boundaries extend from the depths of the 'id' out into the world itself, thereby problematizing this "geometry of the dupe," as I call it, of 'inside' and 'outside.'

The sign is precisely this sort of extension of the imaginary, of the body even, which operates upon a missed encounter of judging what is 'inside' and what is 'outside,' thereby insulating the subject through every movement outside of itself. As Marshall McLuhan reminded us about the age of gadgets, extensions: the more we go outside, the more we extend ourselves in space and time, the lonelier we become, the more isolated we feel, and the more we return inside.

4. A More Dignified Pleasure

Okay, "existential crisis," "existential threat." In contemporary global culture, these phrases repeat. We are indeed in a time of 'repetition.' Lacan had sought to separate the function of repetition from that of dialectics, demonstrating that dialectics can only get off the ground through the efficacy of an originating metaphor, one that is missing for those who constitute the 'difficult cases' since around the 1980s: there is a stubborn repetition outside of any dialectical incorporation. When it comes to repetition,

nothing changes, and it is always a return to the same missed encounter. I will ask you to put this claim to the test for yourself: are we in a time when the remedial quality of dialectic itself seems to have been on the wane?

According to Google Trends, the phrase "existential threat" emerged in 2008 as a popular phrase, and, since that time, its popularity has oscillated but remained in an upward trend.

What happened in 2008?

[Dr. Haris, Habib University: "… it was the housing crisis, an economic crisis …"]

Exactly.

It's not a causal argument, but it's worth noting that 2008 was the beginning of the housing crisis, and the global financial crisis. Suddenly, news agencies were inundated with stories about foreclosures and evictions. It is worth adding that 2008 marks the beginning of a steep rise in the development and use of social media, signaling its entry into mainstream society: Facebook became a global platform, twitter began to influence elections, and YouTube became a dominant visual media platform.

What is an existential crisis? We know, from Jean-Paul Sartre, that, contra Martin Heidegger, existence is that dumb domain of limitless freedom. I would be led to claim that existential crises are difficulties with freedom itself.

I'd like to note the difference that Lacan made between 'being' and 'existence.' The crisis of existence is not epistemological, so it is not a crisis in the field of language, taken as a totality. Rather, it is a crisis with enjoyment, with the enigma of freedom itself. Lacan called this the domain

of jouissance. It was no less enigmatic for Freud, even when he called it libido, or even death drive. What we know about the domain of jouissance is that it is an appeal to magnitudes: there is 'too much,' or 'not enough,' for example. It is often the 'too much' that concerns us within the clinic, and indeed that brings people to see us. For them, it's "too much to bear," and so they come to the clinic to be relieved of that, to find the signifier that would drain the jouissance.

As for Freud, he had located the death drive beyond the pleasure principle, which means that it provoked or intervened into the homeostasis or peace-time of the pleasure principle. Consider the lonely obsessional neurotic. He obviously suffers from peace-time, from his isolation and tranquilization of the other's jouissance, and from the other's demands. He spends his time silencing the other. This is not the problem of death drive. It's a problem in the obsessional's world. He is not satisfied with this situation. He doesn't want peace.

You probably know that Freud discovered the death drive during the time of war, and he framed it, originally, around the so-called war neuroses. They were traumatic times, and, we can see how, even today, traumatic times like that repeat. And he found in the death drive that the speaking-being does not necessarily tend toward homeostasis. The speaking-being can instead travel along a circuit of repeated contingencies, shocks to the system, dopamine hits, . . . or whatever you want to call them. In fact, he had been led to think that we are all beings-toward-death. To put it simply, we can get-off on our death drive, and not want to be separated from it in order to achieve a more dignified pleasure.

5. Blasphemy

The problem of jouissance, of death drive, is fundamentally a problem of existence. Paradoxically, death drive is about 'too much life.' It is a problem within the innermost juncture of our very life. It says nothing about the being of pleasure. Similarly, the existential threat is to our very way of life. The problem of existence is a problem of foreclosure and eviction from that dwelling space of being which we call language. Foreclosure signals disconnection from the world of language, the world of the signifier, from that common space we once believed was cohabited by other linguistic creatures with whom we shared some meaning. If we believed this was possible, our problems were largely within a world, and neurosis was simply the name for our inability to live with the consequence of being in the world.

For example, a husband comes to the clinic and says to his psychoanalyst: "I love my wife but cannot get any enjoyment with her." The man, in his marriage—marriage is what we can call his world—desires enjoyment that is lost in his world. Yet, precisely, he remained in that world, despite it all.

This is not the common case today. Today, within the clinic, one cannot get ahead in one's relation to a partner whatsoever, except through … jouissance. One relates precisely through enjoyment, reducing the partner to a symptom. We can call this the "partner-symptom." One relates to the other, if at all, through jouissance. It is a relationship to existence itself. It often doesn't end well for the happy couple. The break-up could be like a tremendous

wound, as if one's limbs had been torn off by a bomb. Or, god-forbid, men will "go their own way," and, or worse, drive their cars across the sidewalk in revolt, killing off the other sex entirely. We now know of the case, just this morning, of a man who shot and killed a young Pakistani woman ... the beloved Pakistani TikTok star. It is one thing to feel the discontents within a world and quite another to fend for oneself with one's bare existence. This is where the problem of unhomeliness, *unheimlich*, as Freud called it, meets that of radical homelessness.

An existential crisis is a mode of trauma that occurs along the pathway of repetition. It is on the side of the repetition compulsion. What repeats is the sign's independence from the signifier. This is my provisional claim, which I'm testing out. The role of the signifier, its primordial role, was to cause a wound in the drive, enough for a subject to pop out. What the existential crisis reveals is that the subject is not there, as this loss of satisfaction, as the price one has regretfully paid to enter the world of language. Instead, there are these … I call them 'gods-all-alone.' The signifier does not represent them as subjects, since satisfaction has not gone missing for them. Instead, they represent themselves. Language is stuck onto them, like smoke.

If I call them gods-all-alone then it is to point at the blasphemy of it. I use this word provocatively, because blasphemy means, of course, an unpleasant utterance, that is an unpleasant speech act. I ask you to take out your etymology dictionaries to confirm this: it is speech that is beyond the pleasure principle. These gods-all-alone are whatever they say they are. And they are populating the cities. Moreover, in psychoanalysis, as a fact of the unconscious, we like to claim that there is always something

more in what we say, in the statements that are enunciated, then in what has been said or intended. Yet, for the gods-all-alone, there is a fundamental denial of the unconscious, a foreclosure, since they bring their self-diagnoses, their holophrastic speech, and so on, and they form social bonds based upon the principle of a membrane that cannot be punctured.

6. The Stag Hunt

The topic for today's talk was proposed to me as "the stag hunt for the subject in comparative humanities." Of course, I didn't have time to prepare for this talk, nor for this proposed title, except for a few moments before arriving today when I've jotted some quotations down. But I did have time to ask a colleague about this phrase "stag hunt." I learned from her that the phrase comes from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and that it was used to describe a philosophical game revolving around two rabbit hunters. If they cooperate with one another, they will obtain a higher reward, more rabbits. However, if one of them chooses to go for the rabbit alone, they will either get a smaller reward, or, worse, no reward whatsoever.

Another version: a bunch of traps are set out for rabbits by a group of hunters. These hunters are hiding and waiting. If one rabbit is caught, and just one hunter decides to go out and obtain the rabbit too quickly, he may get to eat it, but this act will scare away the other rabbits away. If he waits, and if all can wait then they can all eat many rabbits together.

What is the lesson?

The lesson is about the rewards of delayed gratification, especially for those who work together in a social bond, in

what we've been calling a world. However, the following question should be asked: why is the reward on the ordinal scale? This quantitative metric is something that can be measured—there are x number of rabbits, and x can be higher or lower. To put it in Cartesian terms, it concerns substances in extension, rabbits which are, in the world and therefore can be measured. Okay, but . . .

I want to provide you another version of the game where the stakes are even higher than those from the ordinal scale. You are a hunter among hunters, hunting rabbits. But one of the other hunters points a gun at your face and says: "your rabbits or your life!" Or, to put it the Lacanian way: "your money or your life!" … [laughter] I nearly said "your mother or your wife," which wouldn't have changed anything. This is a choice that doesn't come with any choice whatsoever. If you give up that quantity, the ordinal x, money, then you will retain your life. But if you give up your life, you also lose your money. It is the loss of something in the world . . . this is the condition for the arrival of the subject.

It is not so unimaginable that one can only bear life through the loss of something in extension, in this case money. Contra Rousseau, we can even say that giving up more of it would be better for you. We know a thing or two about this in psychoanalysis because we've discovered, very early in the profession, that it is sometimes only by giving up money, more rather than less, that the analysis is worth a damn to the patient. Without doing this, life will not be livable for these patients. Hence, in the world of "free," this "free world" that we keep rocking in, this world of "freedom," this world in which you now live, perhaps we should not so readily succumb to the temptation: the price you pay with every freedom is perhaps felt inversely in jouissance.

Incidentally, I tried an experiment many years ago when I was a graduate student. I offered most of my possessions for free through an online market. Would you believe me if I told you that I did not receive a single offer? I thought it was curious, so I adjusted the advertisement and put a price, one that was much higher than I thought was reasonable. Suddenly, there were offers, and they were haggling to bring the price down. How quickly did I stimulate their desire for these things! Money is an instrument in psychoanalysis, just as much as it is an instrument in education, and we cannot be too quick to call for its abolition until we have fully understood its relation to existence, jouissance, and trauma.

7. Habitat of the Signifier

Where does this leave us with those existential threats that face us along the various borders of our life-worlds? At any moment, we both know, we could be hearing the drones overhead. These contingencies repeat, unpredictably—they are predictably unpredictable, like an abusive husband's violence. Each country now declares another, usually one along its border, for causing an existential threat: 'they are threatening our very existence!' It happens at the same time as our little gods-all-alone claim that others are threatening their existence? We have no choice but to believe them, it's real. To be clear, this is a problem not only in geopolitics, but the existential threat is in our classrooms, our clinic, on the front lawn of Columbia University, in the White House, at the dinner table with our family, and, finally, why not just say it: in the relations between the sexes.

It's a social fact of our new age. The other is, in the final instance, a threatening signifier that cannot be assimilated. So, we do not fare any better than the psychotic who,

because he has not assimilated the signifier, witnesses its return, in a paranoiac mode, all around him as a castrating force in the real.

Let me retell an old psychoanalytic joke, but with a twist.

> A man goes to see his psychoanalyst complaining that he is a piece of corn and a giant chicken is trying to eat him.
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> The psychoanalyst takes the man in for several weeks. Finally, he was cured, and he left analysis.
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> A few days later he returned: "Doctor, doctor, help me!"
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> The analyst responded: "but I thought you were cured, you no longer thought you were a piece of corn!"
>
> The patient responded: "I know that idiot! But the chicken doesn't know it."

This was a joke told for decades by Slavoj Zizek, Alenka Zupancic, and many others to describe the Freudian unconscious. They wanted to show that the other is a "subject supposed to know": the chicken knows on behalf of the subject. In this conception, the Freudian unconscious is conceived as a domain of 'unknown knows,' things we do not know that we know. We are not meant to question the obvious delusion of the patient: it is he who knows, and not the other who is supposed to know. The patient knows that the chicken threatens his very existence, and is ready to gobble him up.

In fact, it is a terrible thing, … to be devoured. It's no joke. Comedy becomes difficult in this new existential age. Lacan had discussed the analogy of a crocodile whose jaw comes down upon you, and he called that, provocatively, the mother's desire. The father's "no," that was a "bar" placed into the crocodile's mouth to keep it from closing shut. In this case, the father is what keeps the subject from an existential crisis, though we don't quite like him much for it. You owe your very existence to your mother, then.

The existential crisis is a sign that the bar has gone missing. It means that patriarchy, as it is conceived within the clinic, is a thing of the past, and that, precisely, today it is even *worse*: patriarchy returns in the real. That's how Lacan put it: "from the father to what's worse." The missing bar means that the sign is not barred from its referent, its object, and that it reaches its zenith in the imaginary.

The psychotic therefore has access to a truth barred from the neurotic. For him, language, signifiers, are foreign, like a parasite. The psychotic is attacked by signifiers. Lacan had even said that for the psychotic, because the signifier is unacceptable, it returns in the real, or in what Freud called perception. Today's environment shows us that this can be generalized: the real is the natural habitat of the signifier, from the beginning. It is why in the clinic we can sometimes construct a memory of the primordial impact of the body with the signifier.

8. Singularity of Knowledge

I therefore propose several adjustments for those of you in the humanities so that we might rise to the occasion of the existential threats that we face to our work: from meaning

to jouissance, from dialectics to repetition, from signifier to sign, from desire to trauma, from dream to nightmare, and, finally, from being to existence.

Lacan once said that "there is in effect something that cannot be assimilated by the signifier. It's quite simply the subject's singular existence." If we want to comprehend the subject, it will begin with the enigma of jouissance separated from language. I would offer one final adjustment, one which, in my view, will be one of the radical adjustments we will have to see for pedagogy to continue in the years ahead, and one which the psychoanalyst is astutely prepared to provide testimony: the shift from universality and particularly toward that of singularity.

The shift will be toward the singularity of knowledge, which is not necessarily the same as the singularity we might expect from a psychoanalyst.

It's a prediction: singularity of knowledge will be the only way forward in the age of artificial intelligence, and, as such, it will be a radical advancement in the respect we give to the category of the subject. It is a lesson that psychoanalysis is best prepared to transmit, since our focus is not necessarily on the 'case' but on the singularity of the knowledge and speech addressed to us by 'subjects' to whom we offer dignity as speaking-beings, respecting the signs that they bring to us in analysis enough to follow them as they approach the variety of truths that they present to us in their speech in the origin and history of their confrontation with language.

World is a Dream of Each Body: On Freud's Negation[3]

1. The Interpretive Muscle

Thank you for the invitation to speak on this occasion of the 100th anniversary of the publication of this short decisive text by Sigmund Freud, titled, in English, "Negation." I wanted to discuss what makes the centennial significant, but I realized that it would require too much interpretive muscle on my part.

In any case, why shouldn't we conceive of interpretation as a muscle? Perhaps it sounds silly, but it's not meant as a joke. In fact, the phrase "it was *not* my mother" is also not a joke. Rather, it was related to a function which Freud referred to as "intellectual." I propose that the intellectual function, in its relation to the analyst's resistance, be the key to unlock what is pivotal about this essay.

When interpretation becomes entangled with intelligence, it can also be thought of as body phenomena, which means that it can be an 'auxiliary organ.' I'll not go into the cultural analysis of this era of intellectual gadgets that are seemingly tethered to the body: smartphones, smart-watches, smart-glasses, smart-rings, and so on. Instead, I would like to highlight an important passage from Freud's *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) where he described a quantum

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[3] This is a gently edited transcription of a seminar delivered on the invitation of the Psychoanalytic Institute for Social Research, the Elvio Fachinelli Institute, and the European Journal of Psychoanalysis in Rome, Italy.

discharge of excitation into not only the muscles, but also the skin. The discharge of excitation—or what Lacan called "jouissance"—into the skin doesn't necessarily imply that it is pleasurable. But it does help us locate a nexus of jouissance and body, or skin. The only aspect missing from this picture is interpretation in an intellectual key. For that reason, I would like to turn now to the role of pleasure in the interpretation of dreams.

I've long been fascinated by octopi. The body of the sleeping octopus is suspended in water, and colors of variable intensity and hue dance up and down its skin. It's clear to me that the octopus dreams outside of itself, with its body, and its dreams manifest upon its skin as signs. The signifier is just such a sign. Lacan insisted on this point, and it remains constant throughout his teaching. In any case, Lacan claimed, without qualification, that Freud's entire work reveals that "all is but a dream" and that "everyone is mad." For my part, I had to verify it, so I went in search of the trajectory of Freud's thought, extracting three logical moments.

2. Three Moments in Freud's Work

First there was the interpretation of dreams. I discovered that the interpretation of dreams—bear in mind that the title of this book is an equivocation, since the dream is what interprets—motions toward a principle, formalized only at the end, of what would diminish 'excitation.' In other words, the dream is made up of what Freud later referred to as "pleasure." It is a delicate point, but the interpretation of dreams is all about pleasure, achieved through continuous censorship. In everyday life, we often think of censorship as if it were about a message that is not allowed to pass.

However, it is about what is allowed to pass, namely satisfaction. Freud wrote that the "affect of the simple dream shows that strong emotional complexes have found satisfaction." In other words, censorship pursues a "false negation," a "faux neg," as I call it. Psychoanalysts are not positivists, but we can also speak about "false positives" and "false negatives." Hence, when one says "it was *not* my mother," it is a "faux neg." It is the fawning [faux-neg] of the pleasure-ego, of the ego saturated in pleasure.

Second, in the years ahead, especially from 1914 until 1926, Freud foregrounded symptoms.

From his text "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through" through to "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety," there was an exploration of the limits of the intellectual function known as interpretation. During this pivot, the symptom shifted more into a mode of necessity. In other words, Freud isolated the repetition of the symptom beyond interpretation. The symptom manages the real of which anxiety is but a signal. In this first moment, then, Freud isolated pleasure within the dream-world, thanks to the body suspended during sleep. Yet, there was a hole foreclosed in the dream, its navel. In the second moment, the symptom, rooted in the body, repeats along the track of necessity. What is curious is that in 1925 or 1926, Freud became more explicit about the intellectual function and its convergence with pleasure and interpretation.

What happened during the third period?

It is interesting that he turned increasingly toward mythologies. He proposed to study mythologies using the conceptual vocabulary found in his dream interpretation

book. He even says that a text in waking life can be distorted by such censorship techniques as condensation, displacement, and so on. In this moment, repetition of satisfaction within waking life converges with interpretation: certain cultural tropes repeat, historically. For example, there is the repetition of a cultural trauma, that is, through fixation. We see this in *Moses and Monotheism.*

3. Negation: Extimacy and Non-Rapport

Let us now return to the text, "Negation." Freud was effectively asking: can something arising in the Ego be rediscovered in perception, or in what he called "reality?" He made a rather simple point: there is "internal" or "inside" and "external" or "outside," and these two domains are made possible by a "function of judgment." For my part, I imagine a line extending for infinity, and then, at some point, it closes off; a stroke is added to the end of it. In this way, I visualize it the same way as Gottlob Frege, who died the year Freud's text on negation was published, with his "judgment stroke." Another way to think about it is a loop, as in Lacan's diagram of the drive, with a notch on the end of it.

What is striking is that all of this eventually led Freud to conclude that a "no" cannot be discovered in the unconscious. Because of this, the subject of the unconscious is structurally out of sync with external reality. This brings us to a theme that Lacan would later formalize as the "non-rapport." The non-rapport is not about continuity but radical disjuncture: it is a matter of the hole, of the break in the relation of the subject to the world and its objects. No doubt, 'extimacy' has achieved conceptual dignity within Lacanian thought, alongside other well-known aphorisms

which continue to repeat. As a concept, extimacy implies that the Other is 'intimate,' part of the 'inner-world.' Indeed, we often suppose in psychoanalysis that something from the outside is sort of stuffed inside, and that, somehow, it could remain there long enough for us to make a meaningful diagnosis. Yet, Freud maintained that 'reality-testing,' which is the process of rediscovering a lost object in the external world, persists. In this sense, the unconscious is not entirely enclosed: something moves outward, straining the boundary of inner and outer reality.

What is extimacy as a geometrical concept? I suggest to you that it is a principle of false continuity. Ah, but there is a twist! This continuity is nonetheless possibly grounded upon disjuncture, one that has yet to be discovered: in other words, one discovers that the world has gone missing and that it was missing from the very beginning. Freud even went so far as to wonder in this text if we were all mad, though he put it mildly. We do not know the limits of 'reality-testing,' and the distortions of the outer-world by the inner-world. He wrote that one "has to ascertain how far our distortions go."

For dramatic emphasis I propose to take these two terms alongside one another, without maintaining their symmetry: extimacy and non-rapport. For the sake of expediting my argument, I claim that both are principles of disjuncture. For example, the subject of extimacy is alone with the Other. Take the lonely obsessional: the object is a semblant pressed through the screen of his fantasy. On the other hand, the subject of the non-rapport is alone with its *jouissance,* a *parletre* or speaking-being.

When the non-rapport is our point of departure, then we do not suppose from the beginning that the Other has been

internalized through a false continuity. Rather, we begin with the Other that has already gone missing. Moreover, we begin by mapping 'extimacy' onto 'non-rapport,' that is, grounding continuity upon disjuncture; thereby bringing them together into a world where pleasure and 'excitation' coincide with one another through repetition. When we begin from the standpoint of 'non-rapport' we presume, from the outset, that we are alone in the world.

As for the function of judgment: it seems to me that it is a belief that one can get ahead in the game of jouissance, a belief that is absent in cases of florid psychosis. In fact, Freud turned directly to the question of psychosis within his text. Why? He described a "general wish to negate, the negativism which is displayed by some psychotics." *Yes*, the psychotics negate! It's an affirmative negation, which does not negate jouissance whatsoever; from the perspective of the psychoanalyst, the psychotic suffers from an invasion or intrusion of the Other's jouissance. I wouldn't call it an invasion of language, but rather an invasion of jouissance whose medium is language.

So, what is positive, what is negative? Perhaps we can say that what is positive is that which cannot be negated. There is a jouissance that is non-negativizable, that cannot be inscribed within any symbolic coordinates. Consider the clinically depressed. At base, it's a resolutely positive experience, . . . and so is war. Contrary to popular opinion, when it comes to the realism of negativity, for the depressed, it's precisely that they suffer from toxic positivity. The essential question circulates around that of a jouissance that cannot be negated.

In any case, I'm getting carried away, so I'll return to my thread.

4. There is Something of the One

Controversy has surrounded this text from Freud. It has been used to charge psychoanalysis with "pseudo-science." According to these critics, the text permits the analyst's interpretations to go unchecked, since the patient's 'no' means 'yes.' However, what I've been trying to show is rather that it is the patient's interpretations that are always correct, since they are the ones who more often do not lack muscle.

The text outlines a gain of pleasure obtained from the intellectual function, showing that interpretation, through intellect, can itself be linked with that of compulsion. If the repetition compulsion was once confined to the beyond the pleasure principle, death drive, then here, in this text from Freud, we read that the pleasure principle can itself become a compulsion. Freud continued by claiming that freedom from this situation, from the compulsions of pleasure, if I may put it that way, is only made possible through a function of judgment.

I would ask you to read Lacan's two texts on "Negation," which are published in his *Ecrits*, and which are positioned against the backdrop of a presentation from Jean Hyppolite. In one of those texts, Lacan reasoned that negation hinges essentially on the subject's "relation to being" and not on the subject's "relation to the world." Here, we get a sense of what many years later Lacan would describe as the "non-rapport." Hence, when Freud returns with the following interjection: "it *was* his mother," this is not, classically

speaking, an interpretation at the level of intellect. So, what is it?

At the level of jouissance, where the fixation has set in, there is, precisely, a rapport. On the one hand, there is, for the analysand, a strange continuity fueled by faux-negs. On the other hand, what orients the psychoanalyst, is the non-rapport as a real. Jacques-Alain Miller once said: "on the one hand, there is no such thing as a sexual rapport (this is the thesis of the non-rapport), but on the other hand, there is nevertheless the object, the mother, with whom there is a sexual rapport." Here, Lacan will finally make his point, in his seminar "…Or Worse," that the counterpoint to the thesis of the "non-rapport," is that 'there is something of the one.' He did not say that there is "not" something of the one, but that there "is" something of the one. This is the rapport which repeats as a fixation, along the track of necessity, as the 'one' of jouissance outside of symbolic inscription.

5. Foreclosure, Generalized

I would like to bring this to a conclusion with a point about psychosis. If you read Lacan's seminars on Freud's negation closely, they are basically aligned with the development of his seminar on psychosis, you'll discover that there is not enough evidence to suggest that the difficulties in establishing a 'mythic symbol,' or difficulties in the installation of a function of judgment, are problems that are exclusive to psychotics. Lacan seemed more interested in 'foreclosure' as such, and not necessarily in neurosis or psychosis. My approach is therefore to attempt to put an end to the repeated claims that 'repression is for neurotics' and 'foreclosure is for psychotics.' For his part, Freud

retained the word repression, even during his discussion of psychosis. And, I would add, foreclosure can be maintained in cases of neurosis. For example: what is foreclosed in the dream, through the continuity of interpretation, is the hole of the non-rapport.

Therefore, I would claim that the intellectual dimension of interpretation does not offer a tool for working through resistances. It is clear: interpretation, in its classical mode, is itself a resistance. Jacques-Alain Miller says: "to interpret in the service of the pleasure principle, you needn't look anywhere else for the principle of interminable analysis. This is not what Lacan calls 'the way of a true awakening for the subject.'"

Perhaps, in a way, this is why for Lacan, there was, precisely, an end to analysis.

Saturation: Interpretation Machines[4]

I'll begin with this word, "saturation."

I didn't say "suture-ation" because that would lead us toward the other side of jouissance: the relation of the subject to its signifying structure. This latter logic, suturation, was famously explored by Jacques-Alain Miller during his presentation in Lacan's seminar of February 24th, 1965. But if we are to stand on the foundation laid by Lacan, seven years earlier, in 1958, when he distinguished 'true' from 'false' psychoanalysis, we are led to presume that 'suturation' is a false equivocation of 'saturation,' false from the standpoint of *psychoanalytic* discourse.

Why? Psychoanalysis depends upon the experience that it entails, it concerns the speaking-being's particular relationship to speech and truth.

Psychoanalysis is not a hot soup, even if Miller thought himself a *sous*-chef during that presentation on suture. My point is that we shouldn't allow ourselves to get too carried away by the coolness of language, even if it involves homophony. At best, wordplay is a sauce, a joui-*sauce* that can be spread liberally upon discourse.

The word "saturation" was invoked often enough over the last few years of my seminars that it led me to highlight it by isolating it, even by elevating it.

Does that imply that it has been a master signifier? I wouldn't say so.

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[4] This is a gently edited transcription of a seminar occurring online in 2023.

It is strange when a word that designates a toxicity of jouissance stands in place of the master signifier, S1, spreading itself over it. In such cases, the master signifier *swoons* [s-ones] to jouissance, producing *a-stew* [S2] for one to enjoy. It is *a stew* that keeps you fed, which means that you are fed by enjoyment. That was even the basis for the American happy meal, and even the Western buffet, or what is frequently referred to as a 'cold table.' Children today, I'm told, are increasingly fed up with it. It is not quite the surplus enjoyment we adults remember it to be when we were children.

Interpretation should not be expected to desaturate jouissance. Instead, *des autre ate.* That's another false equivocation: *des autre ate.* To my French-Canadian ears, it carries more meaning than it might to yours. Lacan's statement, in *La Troisieme,* was that meaning, as a mode of interpretation, can feed the symptom. And Freud, who moved from dream interpretation toward the analysis of symptoms, revealed that substitute satisfactions can pass, that the id and ego can form an alliance with one another, without any need of 'fresh repressive measures.'

That raises problems for the practice and teaching of psychoanalysis. To be honest, there are too many cooks in the psychoanalytic kitchen.

As Gilles Deleuze once said: 'since each of us are many, there is quite the crowd!' But there are too many people cooking up interpretations today, so much so that one feels compelled to choose which interpretations to digest and which to leave behind. And there is also a proclivity toward junk food—these are the dietary habits of the bricoleur. As for the buffet, it is a bookshelf too, and a social media

wall—without limits. That's always the question we ask at the buffet: what are its limits? It's enough to make those of us who follow Lacan out to be picky eaters. But *des autre ate* … that's what psychotherapy sometimes shows us, namely that the therapist eats you up with interpretations, or else, he gets eaten up by his patients.

Anyway, I'm a bit excited today, obviously, because I discovered that I have two questions, both of which have to do with the symptom fed by a particular mode of interpretation. I said "mode," which is a word also chosen by Karl Marx, not "median" or "medium." It seems to me that psychoanalysis does not operate according to the aphorism 'the medium is the message,' which I heard from some of you earlier. Our approach strives to establish a new relationship to an environment, perhaps even a new environment, which means that it institutes a new pact with not only jouissance but also the Other.

This was a point that Jacques-Alain Miller made during his seminar on the 'new.' This already allows us to go much further than the media ecologists who merely take the object as environment, as medium. That's not exactly our message: for psychoanalysis the medium is not the message. It is not enough to study the environment, there is a transformative dimension to psychoanalytic experience.

Social media … can it feed the symptom? It has a saturating effect, or, borrowing an aphorism from Marshall McLuhan, "it works us over, completely." It functions without limits. Some years ago, I was asked for a recipe to make *a-stew* [S2] out of the media theorist Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Lacan. I've never been a good cook, so I resisted it. It seems to me that this equivocation, 'the medium is the *mass-age*,' offered from McLuhan, cannot guarantee any effect without

risking continuity with its environment—a cooling or flipping of that medium, so to speak. To study the environment at this level, does it remain too clever in relation to it? Perhaps it remains caught up with the medium, unable to recognize it as an object of intelligence. Conversely, psychoanalytic discourse places a-stew upon the burning coils of truth, which makes it any apparently 'hot' medium (except that it also probes analysand's to speak, which makes it characteristically 'cool'). The notion of hot and cold medium can only get us so far in psychoanalysis.

A question: is interpretation an object of psychoanalysis? It plays its part in the discourse of obsessionals, whose interpretations keep moving, as a good work for the master.

Would you believe it?: I was invited, recently, to discuss artificial intelligence with one of the foremost global technology companies. I'm convinced that they were disappointed by my remarks because the conversation approached its limits quickly. For them it was a matter of monetizing intelligence, through its possible therapeutic applications. Take note of the complicity of science, capitalism, and therapy (even when we add the prefix anti- to any of them): it is not clear how to distinguish them from one another. They are truly same machine.

A second question: is intelligence a symptom? What stops us from pursuing this question, other than our fear of being reduced to stupidity? It would be an achievement, in many cases, especially for those whose intellect moves too fast for their own good: we can find them all around us, in our environment, on twitter, in the university, and in the clinical consulting rooms. It was what Lacan named "philosophy," reminding us that we all do it more than we are prepared to admit.

But 'feeding the symptom with interpretation' is not necessarily homologous with taking 'interpretation as a symptom.' That is what constitutes my bold step forward. When interpretation is taken as a symptom, we call it 'artificial intelligence.' In a word: it is not stupidity that troubles me, it's intelligence. What can be done with it? Perhaps it is a matter of putting it in its rightful place. As you know, Lacan said that there is nothing so special about the outcome of psychoanalysis: "madness or stupidity, take your pick!" We cannot so easily claim that the 'mad' are without 'intelligence.'

The speaking-being can bring a-swoon [S1] to a-stew [S2]. To bring a swoon to a stew doesn't seem to mean much—at least according to what is problematically called 'common sense'—because it transforms a verb into a noun, and then that noun relates to another to which there was no prior relation. In other words, it's knowledge taken as meaning, an S1–2. That is how the *S* of the signifier, without any bar, swoons to the Other.

The signifier can be saturated in joui-*sauce.* It is why I once raised the word 'saturated' to the title of a short essay: "Seven Saturated Signifiers." Traditionally, those three Ss were reserved, within Lacanian psychoanalysis, for the *sujet-suppose-savoir,* the subject supposed to know. But it is the one who knows, all alone, not the Other who is supposed to know. That transforms knowledge into a presupposition. It is as if we cannot digest the Other, so the Other comes to us 'predigested.'

The speaking-being speaks with its jouissance. I wonder, therefore, about the master signifier. Where is it? Is that what one goes in search of during an analysis? Lacan claimed

that perhaps it is possible to invent one. He said that all our signifiers are only ever received. Could it mean that we are quite possibly full of them, all of them. He did not say, at this time, that we are trapped in a web of signifiers. That is one of those Lacanian aphorisms that are often taken as a presupposition. When we presume the s-barred, we risk missing the way that the s-spars against the Other.

We are full on signifiers, it's olive stew (all of S2). In other words, it is a recipe for anorexia.

[laughter from participants]

You can laugh! Unfortunately, I know too much about it … because this word, 'predigested,' was once highlighted by my analyst. I am only teaching from my own experience, and what I can tell you is that the anorexic is perhaps full on infinity. That's what the therapists, scientists, professors, and capitalists—those triumphant philosophers of our time—keep cooking up for us cold: infinity. The anorexic is simply the one for whom nothing is chosen in place of the fullness of infinity.

The symptom and the body: they are merged in the imaginary. It is an imaginary inflation of the body, that is, of the Ego, without recourse to the master signifier. The body inflates, the one in the mirror, and the symbolic shrinks away to nothing. You know, when anorexia became a concern in America, it was after the fathers went away to war. God knows the horrors that were going on out there on the frontlines. We can only imagine the bombs, the killing, the tyranny. It was real. What is fascinating is that the word anorexia introduces a negation, a negation which is nothing of the sort! Anorexia is defined not by the rejection of food, but by the absence of any rejection of inflationary

jouissance. It is a matter of bringing the real back to the body. So, the question that Lacan asked was if one could invent a signifier without meaning, one not received from the Other?

It now occurs to me that it's curious that "saturate" means to "remain full." It emerged with this meaning in the 16th century as an invention of science. Science has for a long time been quite full of itself—what can stop science? It is equally obvious that saturation is a principle of exclusion, one that promotes isolation from the world (since there is already too much on one's plate). There are even some who insist upon growing their own food (which is always in abundance for them) and living on their own farm. To eat what one grows for oneself and not what is perhaps offered to them from the market . . . It is with the lord that one begins to experiment with the contours of infinity. Hence the contemporary figure known as the "edge-lord" asks, much like the trifler in a video game, "what are the boundaries to infinity?"

Maybe psychoanalysis can offer a first point of contact with the world. Those timeless feuds of social media, so characteristic of the feudal mode, signal contemporary discontents: it is in the nature of feudalism to repeat itself and not to become incorporated into the dialectics of capitalism. The transition from feudalism to capitalism marked the invention of a threshold or an interface with the Other. The history of political economy shows us that it is only through capitalism and science that analytic discourse was able to take hold. Capitalism is a 'vanishing mediator' only to the extent that it introduces the very 'mediation,' without saturation, that would allow serfs to cook up a preliminary relationship to the world.

Those who live on farms, and in the village, have for a long time scoffed at the cold intelligence of the city-dweller. This is why I insist upon bringing intelligence to the point of its stupidity.

When I say that intelligence is an object, I mean that it is a gadget. We are on the cusp of possibly realizing that artificial intelligence is the route through which science approaches fiction. Lacan said that woman is a symptom, but today we can see that your girlfriend is also a fiction, and you can download her for $19.99. With the gadget, intelligence will take hold of the sex-doll, and she will eradicate the real in its entirety. Can the scientist accept the lie that is necessary for its point of contact with the world, or are they too smart for their own good? The sex-bot comes 'predigested,' since you already know in advance, once you pay the $19.99, that she is prepared to sleep with you. It is the crowning achievement of our "consent culture." There are no limits to the enjoyments now on offer.

Lacan said: "there is but one social symptom: every individual is in effect a proletarian, that is to say that no discourse is at the disposal of the individual by means of which a social bond could be established." Can we say that the proletarian is fed up with feudal capitalism, and with the responsibilities continually put onto one's plate? It means that each one must invent oneself as a proletarian. Without the factory, there is only the bedroom—and the universe populated by those non-dupes who wander without maps or 'desire.' They are fed up with infinity, and with the feuds, and they are cooking up new schemes to reach out to us.

What has been called the party in Marxism cannot anymore make a pretense at expressing the common interests of workers because the category known as worker, in its

traditional form, has been replaced by those who enjoy for a living. There is nothing common among each proletariat.

It leads them into an analysis, and we are prepared to hear them speak as they begin to reach out to us from their bedrooms. We set the table, with our silence, . . . a plate with nothing on it since they come hungry for it.

Generalized Foreclosure: A Debate with Todd McGowan and Leon Brenner[5]

1. … Or Worse!

Duane Rousselle (DR): Actually, I haven't prepared anything so I will just speak for a minute. The rest of you will have more time.

Also, I don't have a theory. I like what Leonard Cohen says about poetry. He says poetry is ash, it is only evidence of life. I sometimes feel that way about theory with respect to psychoanalysis.

I do have something that orients me … I think I discovered something by surprise in Lacan's work. […] It was in Lacan's seminar "… Or Worse," where, in my estimation, he is really exploring the consequences of the decline of the name of the father, of the mortifying effect of the "no" of the father upon jouissance. It's curious because at the same time there are student uprisings happening in France. And I believe he was thinking these two things at the same time.

The title of the course "… Or Worse," you hear the sound, in French, of "Father." The ellipses are meant to represent the father, but then in the writing, when you read it, it sounds like "father." So, it's not exactly that the father is absent. It is just a question of which register we find the father.

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[5] This is a gently edited transcription extracted from a larger discussion on "generalized foreclosure." It originally appeared on "Theory Underground" Podcast.

In the third seminar, on psychosis, Lacan said that what is foreclosed in the symbolic returns in the real. We could say that of fathers, in a way. Somewhere toward the end, he adds: if we are no longer wowed by the father, if the child is no longer wowed by the father, he will be wowed by others (with a lower case 'o'). I propose that we take that as a concept: the "wow of the father." It's as good of a concept as any other that we could extract and put into use within Lacan's teaching. But who are these others, lower case "o"?

In sociology, these others are the secondary social groups, outside of the family: the peers, the brothers, the fraternities, as Lacan himself called them. That is where Lacan goes at the end of that seminar: toward a theory of segregation. What is possible in the era of the decline of the father, when the father is not the dominant principle of a social bond, in whatever scale—whether it's the family, or in geopolitics? Well, you can have social movements, social groups, that segregate from one another. You have the rise of comrades, of fraternities, of secondary social groups, of others.

If, with the principle of the father, you can sustain a theory of exploitation or expropriation, then with the brothers, you can sustain a theory of segregation and tribal certainty. This is a touchstone for what I've been working on.

2. From Concept to Structure

DR: Before I say what it is that I'm thinking, I want to say that it's quite remarkable that we've a group of people, each with their own kind of question, or line of work, somehow coming together around a shared theme, even though we are all approaching it differently. It almost feels like a cartel.

Where should I begin? I think Todd and Leon, you'd both be surprised at how much I agree with everything you are saying. I agree that we should not diagnose a whole society. But I would also invert things and say that I hope we could be a bit deafer so that we do not hear what's not being said. For example, generalized foreclosure doesn't mean generalized psychosis. So, what does it mean?

Let's begin with the idea of the "concept." What I heard Leon say about concepts, I quite agree with: you don't want to find psychosis in the street. But foreclosure, for Lacan, was also not a concept. We make it that when we build our theories, sometimes, but are we oriented by these bits or are we oriented by something else? There's no reason to glue the concept of foreclosure to the foreclosure of the name of the father. For Lacan, foreclosure was also for neurotics. We know this simply by looking at the dreamwork. There is an area in the dreamwork where interpretation cannot go, and that's the 'navel' of the dream. We can find foreclosure in all the clinical structures. You can test this for yourself by returning to Lacan's teachings. If you take foreclosure as a concept, then it means psychosis.

I propose the following: let's move from orientation by concept toward orientation by structure, from concept to structure. What we know about structure is that it can be found in the streets, unlike psychosis, which is not without its relation to the city streets. Lacan was not a conceptual thinker in my estimation. You can go anywhere in Lacan's work and take a concept, or what we think is a concept—lack, foreclosure, whatever you like—and you'll find another point in his teaching where it's defined differently: the subject, the unconscious structured like a language, the real, whatever it is. Go through the whole of Lacan's

teaching and you'll find that he is not thinking conceptually. He is thinking structurally.

Why is it also important to move from concept to structure? It is because when you move to structure you can no longer presume that society is out there, as I think I heard Leon say, or that it's the 'external world,' as I think I heard Todd say. It's not necessarily so conceptual as to presume that for everybody society is 'out there' or the 'external world,' since we know that this is not the case for some who come to our clinics. For some who come to our clinic there is no internal world, or there is no external world. This is your supposition, your judgment. Moreover, it is a part of the resistance of the analyst. What is the world for each speaking-being, one by one?

Generalized foreclosure is, in some sense, precisely, to take what Leon and Todd are saying to its conclusion, which is to say that we generalize foreclosure because it allows us to move from concept to structure, whereby concepts are not static. It allows us to find our position and to maintain an orientation. Without this movement, an orientation is not sustainable, and we risk falling into another discourse, that of the university.

Generalized foreclosure is for me a very simple thing: it's a democratization of madness. It is to say, as Lacan did in his late teaching, that we are all mad. He said: all the world is mad. So, it's not a generalization of psychosis, which can be diagnosed, not a generalization of a concept, but of madness as such. This discussion is fruitful, but I think I will leave it here for now.

Michael Downes (MD): Thank you so much Duane. Can we get one thing? I think this would help if you can kind of flesh

out this distinction you're using between thinking conceptually and thinking structurally. The difference between concept and structure, and the way you're approaching it.

DR: I can try. A concept is something you can put in your pocket. You can carry the concept, like an object, in your pocket with you wherever you go. It shows the madness of a concept: you have your object in your pocket, and you can pull it out whenever you like without ever abandoning it: foreclosure always equals "this." So, whatever the variable is, let us call it "a," can be anchored to this knowledge of it, S2. It produces the following: S2→a.

When you think structurally, it's about locating yourself in relation to … what it is that is speaking in front of you. Structure for Lacan, was ultimately Borromean. He said it like explicitly.

3. Gadgets and Infinite Worlds

DR: […] Lacan introduced this statement—I'm going to have to paraphrase it because I do not remember it verbatim: we should rise to meet the struggles or subjectivity of our time.

I'm thinking of Marshall McLuhan, and his 'rearview mirror'—trying to avoid the 'rearview mirror' approach. I see that the world today is perhaps not what it was pre Reagon, Thatcher, or Xiaoping. It is a question of whether there's a change and of what constitutes a change. I admit that these questions are still in suspense, but one thing that I'm willing to risk is that the environment in which we have lived does seem to have changed. It means that our theory

should also change to reflect the life in which we currently experience.

George Ritzer, an American sociologist, coined the phrase 'prosumer capitalism' and I quite like it. It gives us a concept that can allow us to deal with something, to speak about something that's important for us in the moment: the fact that maybe it's time to speak of changes in capitalism. We used to get products that were already built for us and then along comes Ikea and they make us build our own furniture, and then along comes McDonalds and they make us build our own Big Macs, and then along comes social media where they are no longer giving us the news but we have to give them the news. It is what Marshall McLuhan would have called a "cooling effect" in the medium.

Think about video games. I used to play Super Mario Brothers as if I was reading a book: it was a side-scrolling, so it moved sequentially, unidirectionally, and one by one. It was as if you were reading 'chapter by chapter.' You go world by world: world 1–1, left to right, then world 1–2, left to right, as if flipping the page. And then chapter two: world 2–1, 2–2, and so on.

I'm listening to what my patients and my own child is doing with video games today and it's a bit like they are building Big Macs.

The child is thrown into an infinite environment, an infinite universe of pure excess, in some sense. It is a world without limits. You know, he is thrown into this world and he has to invent his own rules, syntax, grammar, and build walls in this world. He must invent a space to play. I first discovered this when he was playing Super Mario Maker, a newer version of Super Mario Brothers: they provide you with the

ingredients, scramble them up, like James Joyce did with his language, and then effectively say: 'yeah, I fucked it up—now go build something with it!' That's video games today. You must learn to build something for yourself here. So, you engage in these world-building exercises instead of feeling as though you are a being-in-the-world, thrown into the world.

I agree with what Leon is saying insofar as we learn about these things from our patients if we are listening.

As for the gadgets of our time, we already learned about this from Freud. Freud was discussing gadgets. He wasn't exactly critiquing capitalism, but I think what he was doing—and now I will open a can of worms—was that he was starting to approach an understanding of the influence of the convergence of capitalism and science. He started looking at Leonardo da Vinci and these Renaissance figures at this time, and he was looking at how they're engaging with science, art, and religion during the early moments of capitalism. He found that da Vinci was starving himself, which is what we today call a 'new symptom.' He wouldn't eat or drink for hours while in front of the canvas. This was what Freud was already writing about. But also into the 1920s when he wrote … *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and Its Discontents,* we learn more about the effects of science and capitalism.

Freud … he's talking about science and its impact on civilization. What did he say? Man has become a prosthetic god through his gadgets. He has extended himself—as Marshall McLuhan would also put it—in space-time, and what does Lacan add to this? He asks a simple question: will

we ever get to a point when gadgets will not be symptoms? I leave that question without resolving it.

4. On Deleuze, Death, and Negativity

[Michael Downs reads a sentence written by Deleuze and Guattari, and asks about schizophrenia and negativity]

DR: This is sometimes a critique of Jacques-Alain Miller from Slavoj Zizek. Slavoj says the same thing in his critiques of my work. He sometimes thinks that I am some puppet of Deleuze and of Miller's ideas. And Slavoj even says that Miller has become entirely Deleuzian.

One of the reasons that I edited a book on negativity, which Leon and Todd were so kind to be involved with, was because I was getting thoroughly confused by the concept of 'negativity' in psychoanalysis. In anarchism, for example, the concept of negativity is often taken as a synonym for destruction. Mikhail Bakunin famously said 'destruction is also a creative act.' Maybe it's even the most creative act! In fact, it is not so different from the concept of negativity in Freud.

I was thinking of the dreamwork. And I was thinking of the way censorship operates in the dreamwork. I was kind of following a trajectory of Freud's work from dreamwork to symptoms, which come later, and then to an analysis of mythologies (or what Todd Dufresne, a Canadian critic of Freud, calls Freud's 'sociological moment'). In this later period, what was contained, let us say the jouissance of interpretation, within the world manifests itself in symptoms that can be interpreted. Suddenly, Freud was looking at the world as a dream. Freud was analyzing mythologies in the same way that he analyzed dreams. He used the same words.

There's this trajectory of Freud: a movement toward witnessing the unconscious outside of himself, seeing the dream out there as the world itself, as reality itself. The satisfactions that were hitherto contained in this dwelling space that we call the dream-world, while sleeping, were suddenly found in waking life. And he treated them as a dream in his analysis.

This sort of thinking gave rise to people like Roland Barthes and so many others who were doing some sort of interpretive work on cultural material.

The question for me was as follows: if in the dreamwork, the censorship was used to keep us from waking up, then censorship is a 'false negation' put in the service of the enjoyment, the satisfactions of sleep, then what if all of that goes outside? For Freud, in the later period, negation is already false, in this sense. Even to say "false negation," as I sometimes do, is to be redundant. It leads one, precisely, to where Lacan was led at the end of his teaching when he said that we never wake up, and that the unconscious is precisely the hypothesis that we do not dream only when we are asleep. We wake up only to continue dreaming. Finally, it leaves us with a question: where is negation, where is destruction?

[…]

In the last issue of the Lacanian Review you can find a curious text by Lacan. How does he put it? "Death is a dream." So, death drive, theories of death drive, and so on, look at how Lacan reduces all of that to a dream. Where is negativity? I'm led to this idea that destruction, negativity, could it be a dream? I'll now get to my point. When I hear this statement which you've read from Deleuze, I think

about how it is written: an eloquent statement espousing the virtues of schizophrenia as a type of destruction. Meanwhile, what did Nietzsche say? 'I fear that as long as we have not yet eradicated grammar we have also not yet killed God.' Deleuze is using perfect sentences, with periods and commas.

I mean, come on, he is dreaming.

5. The World and Psychoanalysis

DR: […] I sometimes feel as though I am dangling off the other end of the world.

I witnessed in Russia, a social order that would spit people out and have them publicly declare for themselves as 'foreign agents.' It felt very American to me … the way American groups spit something out, in 'cancel culture.' Rather than having a constitutive tension within the group, the tension would be outside of the group, rubbing up against the group. Lacan said that the group 'isolates together.' It was a curious expression, the comrades, he said, 'isolate together,' which means that you can have a group that segregates without a father. […]

I can't say much beyond that, except, a final point. It's in Lacan's seminar 24. Lacan talks about the world. At first, he says that it is a sphere. Then, he says that you could think of a hole in the world and man drops from it, … dangling from this hole in the world. It's a toric world, not so different from the Cartesian world. Here, I think, we can see the extent to which Lacan was not interested in groups that operate according to a structuring principle that we can call the Father, the father function the paternal function. Or, on

the other hand, a type of group that would organize horizontally, comradely.

I think Lacan was engaged in a practical sociology that led him to produce a space where each would be isolated in one's singularity as if dropped from the hole in the world. But in relationship to a cause that's either worth defending or not. That's the orientation. Perhaps the cause is psychoanalysis. Slavoj Zizek perhaps has his cause. But Lacan built an institution from 1964 into the 1980s that safeguarded this orientation: a principle not of 'isolating together' but of returning each one to their lonely way of relating to the cause of psychoanalysis. Slavoj is without a School, without a cartel, and therefore without anything to say of the Lacan from 1964 onward *except critically*.

The experience of the School would not succumb to two problematic group effects that are either hierarchical, based upon exploitation (as in the Master's discourse), nor horizontal, segregationist. It is a whirlwind, which as far as I can tell in 20 years of revolutionary practice: it is the only space I've discovered that has approximated the anarchist ideal of a social group while ensuring that one remains in a permanent revolt against the tyranny of ideals.

6. The Lonely Place

One more minute, if I may. The last thing I will say is that I have found revolutionaries that were interested in this, and I've even tried to create a bit of a history. Look at Sergia Nacheav, the modernist Russian nihilist. He said: 'the revolutionary is a doomed man, he has no friends, no family, no name, …' and he goes on, isolating the revolutionary from the entirety of the field of the Other. All that remains

is a cause. He started from a lonely place. There was also Max Stirner, and his attack against Marxism and the comrades, but even against the anarchists. He was a nihilist of sorts. Nietzsche apparently stole a lot of his ideas. But he demolished the whole framework of what he calls 'spooks' and began from a lonely place: the creative nothing who makes cause his own.

I think that Lacan also began from a lonely place in his relation to a cause. It was his challenge to those who isolate together and either seek either fathers or comrades.

Part 2: The Unconscious is Politics

The Unconscious is Politics

1: The Device

I am asking a question: "what is this device that we so often refer to as the unconscious?" There may come a time when it will be difficult to speak about it. We shouldn't begin with the presupposition that we know the unconscious through its various formations, such as dreams, slips of the tongue, symptoms, jokes, and so on. These still offer us some surprises but can also produce shock. The unconscious can shock you.

I overheard a philosopher claim that psychoanalysis privileges human-beings because of its focus on the "formations of the unconscious," which are not found in animals or trees. Put another way: the argument was that psychoanalysts privilege human-beings, above all other beings in the world, because they have an "unconscious." Some have even gone so far as to claim that psychoanalysis discounts psychotics because they have cancelled their subscription to the unconscious.

In fact, it seems clear that humans are not at all in a privileged position with respect to the unconscious, especially when we compare them to the lilies in the field, rocks, and non-human animals. Quite simply, mother nature is devouring these beings who are human. It's not a privileged position because it means that we might one day become extinct. To the philosopher, I would respond that the problem is much worse: humans are not entirely submitted to the unconscious. We might therefore claim that even among the human animals, there are very few who can provide testimony to the effects of their unconscious.

Perhaps we are now discovering that most of these human beings are already extinct.

Walter Benjamin claimed more than 100 years ago—he wasn't alone in making this claim—that the human is primarily a being-in-language. It means that the unconscious is something like an accident: not all humans have submitted to it, to this unconscious structured like a language. It is another way to interpret the feminine side of Lacan's formulae of sexuation, which was not meant to designate only biological women: 'not all *x* are submitted to the phallic function,' which translate into 'not all humans are castrated,' or, finally, 'not all humans have been inaugurated into the unconscious structured like a language.'

Is it a problem of initiation into the unconscious? Instead of "inauguration," I could have said "initiation." In the 1970s, Lacan said that there is no longer any trace of initiation in the world. Ultimately, what does it mean? It means, my friends, that we do not all share in our experience of the unconscious. Jacques-Alain Miller said that "the practice of initiation is what produces a sectarian group of those who share the same experience, and which, moreover, always relies upon a grimoire." A grimoire, which is a book of magical spells, might seem like a recipe book found in the film Harry Potter. It seems to me that we must resist this temptation to take the formations of the unconscious as a grimoire, that is, as if there were a few major ingredients in the cooking-up of psychoanalytic experience.

When it comes to the unconscious there is still some magic and surprise. For example, it is surprising to me to have said that not all humans are submitted to it. I happen to like surprises. I'll share an anecdote with you. During the third iteration of personal analysis, I entered a period of

interminable analysis – it was a search for an ending. Those sessions went on only for a few short weeks until I said: "I don't know why I keep coming back, except that each time you end the session I find it surprising. In those moments, I rediscover the unconscious." At that moment my analyst stood up, clapped her hands, walked me to the door, and said: "Okay!" This particular analyst has a commendable practice of "scanding," which means ending the session, by standing up abruptly after clapping her hands and walking to the door. For each surprise, when she stood up, I decided that she was standing up for psychoanalysis when I was not capable of it. It was in these gaps …

Ultimately, that's what brings a person into analysis: a failure in one's commitment to psychoanalytic experience. In the interim, now, I find myself with the responsibility of standing up for psychoanalysis. In a way, that's what I've been trying to do. It doesn't mean that it's easy, especially when I'm among so many friends and comrades.

It raises an important question: what about psychoanalysts? Are they submitted to the unconscious? Psychoanalysts are not entirely extinct, though there are very few of them in the world. In spite of their various mutations: they know how to be human, which means that they know how to make use of their unconscious. They cannot do without it, this Freudian invention. It is why it returns to them, even after they've abandoned it—after all of its meanings have been extinguished. "Nibbana," in Buddhism, is a word to describe the extinction of the flame of desire: it doesn't guarantee that these monks experience the end of their unconscious, since, as we all know, there are some who set themselves ablaze in the petrol of jouissance. It is portrayed as a spiritually guided political gesture, a politics of jouissance.

It's not pretty. After the traversal of the fantasy, when meaning has become dried up, there can remain a kernel of jouissance fixed in the repetition compulsion. This can be isolated as 'one.' When we take the 'one' as our point of departure, we wonder if a 'know-how' can be obtained so that one might reinvent the unconscious, and perhaps even their relation to psychoanalytic experience.

Psychoanalysis cannot do without the unconscious because it is what fundamentally orients them in their practice. It was why Lacan elevated the unconscious to the first of four fundamental concepts, as is well known in his 1964 seminar of the same name: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.* He isolated the unconscious as such, taking it as a fundamental. In 1976, an important year because it also marked a moment of reassessment (Lacan re-situated his prior teaching), he returned to his 1964 seminar to highlight again this point about the unconscious as such. Thus, when he wrote his English preface to the seminar, he demonstrated the following: it is not only those supposed to be "Millerians" who are intent on reading the earlier teachings of Lacan from the perspective of the later. Not at all! Lacan did it himself.

It is a remarkable point: those who read the earlier and middle periods of Lacan's teaching might resist reading the late period. In doing so, they take Lacan as a 'half-saying,' but of a particular kind. But those who read all the way to the end are able to return again, as if in a circle, to the beginning. For my part, when the excitement dried up in the earlier teaching of Lacan, the late teachings allowed me to go back and rediscover the earlier periods.

Lacan opened up his preface with the following English sentences:

> When the space of lapsus (or interpretation) no longer carries any meaning, only then is one sure that one is in the unconscious. One knows. But one has only to be aware of the fact to find oneself outside of it. There is no friendship there, in that space that supports the unconscious.

The last sentence is striking. It reminds me of the opening passage from Jacques Derrida's text on the politics of friendship: "Oh my friends, there is no friend!" In other words, you are each alone in your relation to the unconscious, without any fraternal support. In any case, there is still much to develop before I can broach the phrase "the unconscious is politics," which is a phrase from Lacan.

2: Lacanian Ideology

Lacan isolated the concept of the "one" in his 19th seminar . . . *Or Worse*. It marked a decisive moment in the trajectory of his teaching. It also marks a break in the Lacan of the Slovenian School, that is, the Lacan of Slavoj Zizek, Alenka Zupancic, and Mladen Dolar. Hence, the earlier and middle period of Lacan versus the later Lacan.

The "one" is not the same as the "subject," the latter being a concept with which you are no doubt already quite familiar. In the 24th seminar, Lacan pointed out that he cannot use the "one" and "subject" as synonyms, nor can he adopt the personal pronoun "I" with respect to the "one."

The most popular of Lacan's essays in the university is "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function I." It presents a subject "objectified in the dialectic of identification with the Other." When interpretation runs out of meaning, there is another knowledge possible, without dialectic identification: one knows. That is what we can extract from the English preface I quoted earlier: "one knows." There is a paradox from this quotation though: "one is in the unconscious, though one finds oneself outside of it." It's a shocking statement. I endeavor to present it less as a shock and more as a surprise, which isn't easy because it means that I need to cipher it, to discover a ciphering mechanism.

We find today that there are those who do without the unconscious by presupposing it. They presuppose the unconscious according to its formations rather than its function as if they witness it from a distance. What Jacques-Alain Miller named the 'real unconscious' is already here, and, when facing it, our friendships, fraternities, comrades, offer us no ultimate support.

Presupposing is not the same as supposing. For example, the subject-supposed-to-know is not equivalent to the one who presupposes knowledge, as in the statement that "one knows." Ultimately, what does one know, except the other's intentions, that is, knowledge taken as a presupposition? On the one hand, the subject of the unconscious doesn't know what it already knows, which makes it an unconscious supposition of knowledge. Lacan maintained that this was Freud's device, and that's why he didn't hesitate to call Freud an idiot. It is the knowledge that is at stake in *idiot-ology,* which isn't for each one. Lacan said: "Freud seems to have required that the unconscious be a knowledge [...] involving the effect of the signifier." It was enough to for

Lacan to decouple from Freud to state that there was the Freudian unconscious and then there was the Lacanian unconscious: "the unconscious isn't Freudian, it's Lacanian, though it doesn't stop the field from being Freudian."

On the one hand, there is the subject of the unconscious, which implies that there is an effect of the signifier, such that the subject doesn't know what he knows. On the other hand, one already knows in advance about the unconscious and its formation. It leads me to a point that I've made a few times in these last few months, while discussing the work of my friend Slavoj Zizek. I don't see why I shouldn't repeat it: Slavoj famously discussed Donald Rumsfeld's logical justification for the American military exercises in Iraq. I didn't use the more common signifier "war." I used a more delicate one, "military exercise." The word "war" can be quite shocking for some people in Russia, today. It is for no other reason: we are at war with the signifier.

Rumsfeld produced the following epistemological spreadsheet: known-knowns, known-unknowns, and unknown-unknowns. Slavoj realized that it's not an exhaustive list, since there is a missing fourth position: unknown-knowns. What does each position imply? First, the known-knowns concern what we know that we know. We are perfectly conscious of having this knowledge. For example, I know that there are people in this room, and I know that I know it. It doesn't require modesty on my part to say so, since I can do it with a certain amount of conviction. This knowledge seems to me indisputable, unless a set theorist enters the room. But, for now, you cannot convince me that there are any other people in this room other than the amount shown to me.

Moving forward: there are known-unknowns, which concern limitations to knowledge. These are conscious limitations to knowledge. We could invoke the philosophies of Immanuel Kant with his noumenon, or Ludwig Wittgenstein with his statements from the Tractatus. There are people who will read a transcript of this presentation but I cannot say that I know how many there will be. We can indeed be aware of the limits to our knowledge. In the final instance, I would say that this position involves some epistemological modesty. If the first position is characterized by a degree of certainty, then the second is characterized by a degree of modesty. Finally, for Rumsfeld, there are the unknown-unknowns. Simply put, this is entirely unknowable, beyond the limits of knowledge. It concerns what we cannot even know that we do not know. We can say that Rumsfeld lacked modesty, but not that he was ideological. There was something stubborn in his orientation, in his justification for those military exercises in Iraq. We don't even know what we do not know about there being weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. It was a curious statement.

Do the unknown-unknowns not concern a hole in knowledge? It is terrifying, in a way, because it is the opening of an excess, a void, beyond what can be contained by knowledge. Non-knowledge is not a negation of knowledge at all. It is an excess of affirmative knowledge. This is why the statement about "not knowing what we don't know" didn't stop. It continued: ". . . about weapons of mass destruction." This affirmative certainty comes already included in the void, as a prefabricated 'known-known.' A certainty against the hole of 'unknown-unknowns.' The signifier itself becomes a weapon of mass destruction since

it gets deferred, pushed forward from the void. It means that it was not accepted, since the jouissance of meaning has taken the upper hand over the signifier that would have tranquilized it.

Had there been an effect of the signifier, Rumsfeld would have produced a statement revealing a formation of the unconscious. Perhaps it would have been a parapraxis. But that is not what occurred: Rumsfeld spoke precisely, clearly, with concision. In fact, in his portrayal of Rumsfeld's speech, it was Slavoj Zizek who produced several slips. Had Rumsfeld produced a slip, we might have found the missing fourth position in his epistemological spreadsheet: unknown-knowns. Instead, Slavoj imposed this missing place as his own presupposition concerning Rumsfeld's "ideological" commitments. It was as if he was looking into Rumsfeld's eyes and witnessing his own "Lacanian Ideology" reflected back at him.

Perhaps, in the final instance, that's what "Lacanian ideology" is all about. It is interesting that Lacan first discovered something of a Lacanian ideology in a psychotic man. Lacan had noted the way in which this man repeated Lacan's speech aphoristically: "... all speech is signifying." Lacan dubbed it "the first Lacanian psychosis." It wouldn't be the last.

3. False Positive

What is signaled in the one's decoupling from the unconscious, in the one's segregation from the Other? The one knows about the formation of the Other's intentions, its signifying articulations. It is why our knowledge of the formations of the unconscious can operate by exchanging

surprise for shock. We are shocked by where the teaching of the late Lacan leads. For Rumsfeld, there was a horror of not-knowing that compelled him toward a certainty. The field of tacit suppositions was missing, which means that the unconscious wasn't there, though it was supposed to be there.

Today we often speak about the "tone" of the other. The phrase "tone deaf" has surfaced in popular discourse. It is enough to be "tone deaf," or for one to point at the tone of the other, for them to segregate from others. When the signifier is foreclosed it becomes a weapon of mass destruction (WMD). The terrible truth is that those WMDs are now lined up on the borders of Finland, entering Belarus, and flying past Taiwan via the Chinese air-force. War repeats, and despite what you might think: it is a resolutely positive experience of history. It is positive because it resists the intervention of any signifier that would negate it, which doesn't mean that there isn't a continuous encounter with it.

When Joe Biden looked into the eyes of Vladimir Putin and claimed that he saw a murderer, I would claim that the latter was correct in stating unambiguously that the former had only seen his own soul reflected back at himself. There is a movement from the subject housed by the Other, dominated by the Other, to the One decoupled from the Other and up against the world. This helps us decipher the surprising passage from Lacan's pivotal seminar … *Or Worse,* which I will now quote for you:

> There is something of the One, but there is nothing Other. The One, as I have said, dialogues all alone, since it receives its own

> message in an inverted form. It is he who knows, and not the one supposed to know.

The One is up against knowledge: knowledge delinks from the truth of any 'half-saying,' decouples from the sayings of the subject split by signifiers. It is why I find it difficult to speak about beings-in-language today, because there are many who do not maintain a subscription to the unconscious. As for me, I would say that I have something like a subscription, though I have not always paid for it, except through my work. I do some work and then they send me issues of various psychoanalytic books and journals. Of course, I often do not receive them. But they are nonetheless sent out on subscription, delivered to former addresses in India, Russia, Toronto, USA, Ireland, and so on. It doesn't mean that I am without a subscription. It's just that these books and journals end up in destinations and I am not there. There is no being-there.

I read bootlegged digital copies of printed editions from the surface of a screen. I read the sentences as if they were typed by a device known as a typewriter. Except that the typewriter wasn't used during any phase of the publication process. The typewriter is a screen memory from our electronic age. In any case, I was reading one of those digital editions, something about the *l'une-conscious,* the "one-conscious," which is not a better word than the one Lacan used in his 24th seminar: "one-blunder," which is a homophone of the French word for "unconscious" [*unbewoops*]. The unconscious as such, taken as a mistake, accident, blunder, or, if you like, a "surprise" to the human-being, is the device.

I've used this word "device," but can we really claim that the unconscious is a device? That's what it was for Freud. It was a magical typewriter. But, in the end, was it that for Lacan?

Ultimately, the unconscious cannot be taken as a device akin to a typewriter.

What sort of magical writing pad was it for Freud? It kept a limitless account of signifying effects, forgetting nothing. The typewriter accepted the signifier and put it into a sequence. You simply move the little cylinder from left to right and from up to down, retaining, indefinitely, all markings. It retains the totality of signifiers. I would say, though, that it is not clear that the unconscious accepts the signifier as such. Freud and Derrida ultimately missed this aspect of the unconscious. For them, the magic writing pad was a device for thinking about the retention of signifying effects upon memory. And even Lacan's "L Schema" functioned in this way, as a typewriter: you move from left to right, pulling the cylinder or platen, and then from up to down, in a "Z" shape. That's the movement of the vectors from that schema.

Some poets thought that they found a short-cut via this "Z" shape. I'm thinking of E. E. Cummings, who was cited by Marshall McLuhan as being exemplary of poetic style in the age of the typewriter. Cummings took some short-cuts, moving right down the page, as did John Cage, along what Lacan might have called the "Symbolic Axis." Lacan's "L Schema" demonstrates how the empty speech dictated into a typewriter opens into "full speech," into the "symbolic" unconscious. It was what E. E. Cummings' poetry also did. You can stop for a moment, every so often, while reading it, to catch your breath. That's what the device did. It allowed you to catch your breath. Today, we can't seem to so easily catch our breath. We run after truth, toward truth, and we run and run, until we burn ourselves out.

To cut a long story short, the hypothesis of the symbolic unconscious led some political Lacanians to hold onto the dream that politics is essentially a field of constitutive lack, that it is a dialectic field, and that it is concerned with a latent totality (i.e., a total of relationships submerged by the imaginary and capitalist worldview). My wager is that constitutive lack is nothing more than a presupposition. It is a presupposition that the one is represented by a signifier for another signifier, when, in the end, the one is fundamentally without representation.

Today's publishers do not anymore use a typewriter nor do they require a serious typesetter. It's less important and less costly than it used to be. It's simply not done in the way that it used to be done. As you know, everybody today can easily publish their own book. It's not an achievement. The achievement might even be to stop publishing books. Perhaps today's books are just defenses against the signifier: you'll find no signifiers in books today. You place your book onto the bookshelf, and it can keep the signifier from ever entering your world. You don't even read books anymore—you use them as a reflective surface. The book has become a portrait, while the bookshelf has become reducible to an Instagram feed. In the final instance, a book is reducible to the rectangular image drifting along the circuitry of social media. We can see it also in political texts today: rectangular images circulating as quotations on social media—but the fonts are a part of the image, they are not separated from it. The acoustic signifier reduced to the image, flattened, no longer a phoneme.

Where have all the typewriters gone? I'm reminded of Marshall McLuhan, who claimed that the typewriter brought us to a world characterized by the "echo chamber of

instantaneous celebrity." That's how he put it, long before we began to more casually use this expression "echo chamber." Except it's even worse. McLuhan insisted that a typewriter transcribes thought but doesn't express it. It means that the typewriter ciphers thought. This is perhaps also what Cummings was doing, and perhaps even James Joyce (whose best friend was apparently a typewriter). It led G. K. Chesterton to his famous claim that typewriters allowed women to refuse being dictated to, so that they could take up roles as stenographers. It makes women into . . . what? The function that has gone missing, by which I mean the signifier. It hasn't gone without notice by heterosexual men who today circumambulate around women, instead of the workplace or the religious temple. McLuhan even claimed, in his way, that the typewriter was responsible for the first wave of feminism. It's not such a crazy claim. The United States census of 1910 revealed that more than 81% of professional typewriters were women.

In any case, any gender could be taken as a signifier. Why not? The hipsters tried to bring back typewriters more than a decade and a half ago, even as they exaggerated their masculinity, always with an ironic dimension. What they showed us with their beards and flannel was that they couldn't so easily do it because the times have changed, hence the irony. Today, gender still offers us some surprises, but the signifier has become saturated in jouissance. It is quite different from what Slavoj Zizek and Alenka Zupancic say to us. For example, take their comments on LGBTQ+. They have claimed that the plus in LGBTQ+ is a symbol for "difference as such," or for "immanent antagonism." That presupposes something about the human-being, even for all of them: the + is a surplus element that cannot be

contained within the chain of signifiers L-G-B-T-Q … So, the + is for them a surplus jouissance, a real, against the signifiers LGBTQ. What happens is that the plus therefore keeps getting pushed forward, displacing the subject's encounter with the terrifying "real." Okay, but what if it is worse?

I would say that gender in its various formations reduces the signifier to jouissance. The plus is not a real which resists signification, surplus jouissance, or whatever else, as a surplus element cut by some symbolic device. Not at all—actually, isn't it quite the opposite? Each letter that we add to the series stands for this "difference as such" already inscribed in culture, each stands for an affirmative jouissance, a one-all-alone in a repeatable series. These ones which repeat in the series are resistant to the effects of the signifier. It means that the + should be taken precisely as what replaces the signifier, a mark that would indicate the place where the repetition of the failed encounter occurs; the place where a signifier would put an end to the repeated series, delaying, postponing the encounter. The letter always arrives at its destination, since it returns. I am outlining a fundamental difference: the + is this mark of an endless deferral of the signifier that would end the repetition, that would bar the affirmative jouissance at stake in the series.

Finally, it means that the + is not a + at all: it is a faux-plus, a placeholder for the ineffective name of the father, thereby demonstrating that it has weakened. It is a negation that cannot be accepted by the series which repeats. I believe that this outlines clearly what is at stake in today's affirmative culture. You can always keep going, affirming more of the jouissance of the ones-all-alone: "me too!," "me too!," and so on. The sentence can keep going on because you never

have to interrupt the cylinder on your typewriter. It just keeps writing, as if by magic.

4. Capitalism

The coordinates that I've offered today will allow me to produce a bit more clarity next week on this statement from Lacan: "the unconscious is politics." I repeat it in full: "I dare not say that politics is the unconscious but that the unconscious is politics." We can only be oriented by this if we first understand the movement from the symbolic toward real unconscious. The "unconscious is politics" means that we witness our unconscious out there, in the political field from which we've segregated. It was why Lacan insisted, when he made this statement, that some prefer to be rejected from capitalism, some prefer to refuse to admit themselves up to the benefits of capitalism. That's what he said.

Maybe you imagine that Lacan's intention was to promote capitalism, making him a so-called neoliberal. He said that capitalism can "save oneself from being engulfed by the maternal." It was why he said that it is necessary, as we see with the neurotic, that one can only be rejected if one has first offered oneself up to something. You witness the unconscious as political, in that shocking place where the Other appears to you. The unconscious is politics means that we can see the unconscious out there, in the place from which we have been decoupled, without offering ourselves up as political subjects. One witnesses one's politics from a safe distance. There is no subject of politics there, there is no politics of the unconscious.

The Fawning of Jouissance

1. Type 1 and Type 2 Errors

Alenka Zupancic once said about feminine sexuation that it was the 'difference that makes a difference.' It was an advancement beyond the impasses of gender theory that now populate the political field. However, this 'difference that makes a difference' was described as if it concerned an 'inherent negativity.' She once said during an interview:

> Sexual difference is not simply difference between sexes as individual entities, but, more fundamentally, the negativity involved in the constitution of these individual entities. [...] Sexuation is the way in which this negativity or difference that makes a difference is inscribed into positive entities [...] Otherwise, you'd be back to difference as if it were a difference between individual positive entities.

Firstly, there is a critique of naive conceptions of sexual difference, taken to mean the difference between discrete individuals. Next, a more fundamental difference is outlined which concerns the difference within each discrete individual. It raises an important question concerning precisely this discrete individual within which we presuppose an inherent negativity. The internal differentiation of an individual is said to be more fundamental than the differentiation between individuals. However, the fact of there being an 'inherent negativity' does not at all imply that there is no 'discrete individual' about which such a presupposition might be made. In the end, there is a presupposition of an *a priori* effect of symbolic

castration, which returns us to an antiquated Oedipal field. This Oedipal field is witnessed from a theoretical distance. In a word, we are supposed to believe that LGBTQIA+ are 'internally differentiated' just like anyone else, as if the entire field is Oedipal.

Perhaps we could claim that there is something like a 'type 1' and 'type 2' error. Let's begin with the 'type 2' error. The argument opens into a 'false negativity,' a faux-neg. In some way, perhaps it is even a feigning, but, even more than that I would simply refer to it as a fawning of jouissance. This fawning of jouissance characterizes much of contemporary revolutionary political philosophy, even when it presents itself as Lacanian.

And what are the consequences? Let's take stock of a few straightforward examples, beginning again with LGBTQIA+. The + in LGBTQ+ is thought by some to be a 'difference that makes a difference.' However, perhaps what we witness with LGBTQIA+ is a repetition of an encounter of each 'one-all-alone' with the traumatic and ultimately resisted signifier, designated by the +. We know that in the earlier period of Lacan's teaching the signifier had a negative effect. It was thought to be negative because it effectuated a 'no' to jouissance. This 'negativity' of the signifier has been taken up within some LGBTQIA+ discourse as if there were something inherently positive—the + which stands-in for an iteration, 'there is excess, there is still more to come.' It is why we can say that the signifier of the + is a fawning of jouissance. Acceptance of the signifier in its negative dimension would imply that one offers oneself up to its function, desaturating the jouissance, and ending the repetition of the series.

Let's now discuss an example of the 'type 1' error. Of course, I am using this expression ('type 1' and 'type 2' errors) in a general and non-scientific way. But perhaps we could appropriate that language to serve psychoanalysis. There is a faux-plus at stake in what is now referred to as 'toxic positivity.' Ultimately, 'toxic positivity' is a consequence of the fawning of jouissance. It concerns the repetition of jouissance, even when we presuppose its drainage, as in the case of theories of 'constitutive negativity.' For example, take the theoretical implementations of the Freudian 'death drive,' which often get taken up by theorists as if it were an antidote to 'toxic positivity' within political, philosophical, or sociological Lacanianism. Can we say that this theoretical depiction of the 'death drive' is a fawning of jouissance? It can certainly be deployed in such a way as to ensure continued resistance to the traumatic signifier. In such cases, 'death drive' becomes a theoretical defense against the experience of the 'real.' We should be prepared to admit that jouissance is resolutely positive.

What is this faux-plus? There are two wonderful and related jokes from the late Canadian comedian Norm MacDonald that can help us to understand what I mean by faux-plus. I will teach each in my own way:

> My friends told me that I drink too much alcohol. They convinced me to go to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.
>
> Members of the meeting told me that I should first admit that I am an alcoholic.
>
> I said, "... never!"
>
> They asked me: 'why would you say that?'

I said: 'because that's only what Alcoholics say.'

Let me tell now tell you the second joke:

> My friend Bill was suffering from alcoholism. When I heard about this—you know, I always try to look on the bright side of things—I said: 'hey bill, look, I know you have a terrible disease and everything but I think you have the best one!'

What are these two jokes about? They are about the repetition of jouissance in what is called addictions, and about the endlessly avoided encounter with the signifier. The faux-plus is recognized by Norm MacDonald in the statement 'I am an alcoholic' as a saturation of jouissance. The joke doesn't demonstrate an insensitivity to those suffering from addictions. It demonstrates that addiction is a terrible disease precisely because it is the best one. That's the point. You suffer from the positivity of the disease more than the negative consequences of the disease. There is a defense against relinquishing this 'positivity' to the 'negativity' of the world. In the end, these are jokes about the difficulty of admitting any negativity in the world that might desaturate the fawning of one's jouissance.

On the one hand, the faux-plus is in the place where the true-negative of the signifier would have been, and, on the other hand, the faux-neg is in the place where a true-positive perpetuates. That is precisely what we also find under the banner of theories of the 'death drive' today. In the mid-1990s, Jacques-Alain Miller took pains to demonstrate that Lacan eventually abandoned the Freudian theory of the 'death-drive' for this reason, in favor of the concept of 'jouissance.' I will quote him: "what is striking is that Lacan,

proceeding into the dark zone, abandons the Freudian language of the drives. From the Freudian drive, he extracts jouissance." It is a provocative statement, especially since 'death drive' is so popular today among our comrades.

Perhaps you are not willing to follow Miller on this point, but you should nonetheless admit that there is something to it. For Lacan, the 'death drive' was linked to 'demand' and to the 'subject of the signifier,' which was a subject represented for another signifier. So, it was ultimately a Freudian device, which operates out there in the Freudian field. In fact, I'm not proposing that you abandon the theory of the death drive: but we should abandon our theoretical presuppositions about it.

2. Surplus Jouissance

Today we have read from some of Lacanians that it is time to finally do away with the Lacanian concept of 'jouissance.' It seems to me that this is a political attack upon Lacanian psychoanalysis. It is an attempt to decouple from the Other Lacan. Moreover, it is an attack upon the Lacanian unconscious, and even, would you believe it, the *objet petit a*. This retreat from jouissance is a fawning political strategy designed to reduce the positivity of jouissance into a presupposition of 'constitutive negativity.' Does this political strategy succeed? I'm not convinced.

The entire effort is to eradicate jouissance, not as a concept but rather as an experience. In the end, this is what cannot under any circumstance be done. Make no mistake: trauma is at the very core of our political crises today. The + of LGBTQIA+ marks the weakening function of the signifier which has become saturated in jouissance. What is outside

of this discrete configuration? A threatening world. So, those who claim that the concept of jouissance lacks clarity and that it "conflates rather than distinguishes" nonetheless find themselves saturated in this jouissance of the Other. They continuously wrestle with it, and it even compels them to write books about that which they try so desperately to reject: jouissance of the Other. I would say that my discourse aims to puncture a hole; it is not something written on the page but rather a 'hole-puncher,' attempting to punch holes into these rectangular books, when it is possible.

How can we distinguish the concept of 'jouissance' from the concept of 'surplus jouissance?' On the one hand, 'surplus jouissance' can be taken as a remnant of jouissance, while jouissance as such is saturating. It is always possible that the sur-plus be taken as if it were a faux-plus. I would ask you the following question: what do we make of this 'jouissance' that saturates the book during the book's very attempt to do away with it? The one who wrote that book witnesses the Lacanian unconscious from a distance, as if outside of it, and yet there, in the book, we are drowning in jouissance, which it attempts, tirelessly, to do away with. The book is about nothing else. It is why I claim that books are saturated in jouissance, defenses against the negativity of the signifier.

Incidentally, what was it that Darian Leader offered us in his very interesting book on the topic of 'depression?' It was a clever book. It seems to me that Lacan leads us toward a different conception of depression, one that is not essentially about 'loss.' It is why there is a stubbornness in our theoretical understandings of depression, especially when we do away with the concept of jouissance. When I hear people speak about depression—there are some who celebrate it as a revolutionary concept, as a certain 'realism'

or non-dupery—it is clear to me that there is a relinquishment of the traumatic encounter with the signifier.

Russell Grigg made a clear point about depressive melancholia many years ago. He said that depression for Lacan is ultimately not marked by 'loss,' as in 'the loss of the object,' which would make it a variation on the logic of mourning. Rather, depressive melancholia is marked by the 'unbearable proximity of the object.' In other words, it is an inability to effect a separation from the fawning of one's jouissance, since that would imply the courage (and it could even be a political courage) to offer oneself up to the negativity of the signifier. That makes depression one of the penultimate experiences of 'toxic positivity.'

It's not exactly something you would be capable of convincing the depressed one, since you cannot, under any circumstance, convince the depressed one that she is suffering from too much happiness or positivity. Yet frequently that's what occurs in depression. You'll even notice that the depressed one has built up an entire life to convince themselves that the world is the place of the positive, even more to avoid the negativity of that world. It is why today's psychoanalyst functions as a toxicologist just as much as a 'hole puncher.' The jouissance at stake in experiences of depression aims toward continuity with the Other such that the Other must speak the same theory, language, wear the same colors, and so on. When the Other refuses this continuity or consistency, you are shocked!

At this point, you will witness the abandonment of the Other's negativity. It means that the psychoanalyst aims at traumatization, which is a very delicate 'politics' of the clinic. One must discover the means through which this

traumatization might occur, because without it there can be no subject of politics.

In the end, we could say that the depressed person interprets the negativity of the world as a faux-plus. For this person, the world is profoundly negative and threatening. But a false optimism is projected into the world to justify one's retreat. She retreats from the Other to institute her 'positive' world against which she positions herself as the 'true negative.' The psychoanalyst must learn to recognize that she is not at all this true negative that she presents as herself: she is fawning. It is why we can claim that some depressed people suffer from stubborn happiness: the subject is happy. Lacan put it like that when he spoke about what might exist regarding the subject of the drive. Incidentally, I am reminded of a nightmare once told to me by a male heterosexual patient:

> A woman was smiling, laughing, dancing, and mocking me in public. I was trembling, crying. This only intensified the abuse. She was screaming: "you're such a woman!, you're such a woman!"

Perhaps that is what troubles many heterosexual men today: women are happy. It is the opposite of what the comedian Bill Burr claims about men. He says that heterosexual women can't stand when men are happy. In psychoanalysis, we can say that 'women are happy.' It also makes me think of two films which some of you have perhaps seen: *Midsommer* and *The Wickerman*. Watch these two films and you will see what is at stake in Lacan's claim that 'the subject is happy.' It should be taken in the register of 'feminine jouissance.' This 'feminine jouissance' became the

jouissance as such for Lacan. I am suggesting that we move from feminine sexuation to jouissance as such, which is not exclusive, of course, to biological women.

Lacan discussed the happiness of the subject of the drive in relation to a logic of repetition. It should be taken as a repetition of the faux-plus doomed to repeat its traumatic encounter with the signifier that it foreclosed. If psychoanalysis operates upon the discontents of civilization then it is perhaps alone in allowing this traumatization to occur for the 'one-all-alone.' Psychoanalytic politics perhaps relates to this politics of trauma, on the production of a 'hole' in the excessive void, without recourse to the perpetuation of the series of feigned encounters. That is what the signifier produces in the void, a hole. Sur-plus can be a wonderful defense against jouissance as such, but, in the end, it doesn't hold up. The signifier is reduced to its jouissance in the repetition of the series until it can finally become isolated as 'one,' all alone, without the repetition. Of course, the word 'traumatism' was used by Lacan, in the French, almost as an equivocation: it sounds a lot like the word 'hole,' and Lacan didn't fail to mention this point to his audience.

3. The Lacanian Unconscious

When Lacan said that the 'unconscious is politics' he wasn't speaking about the Freudian unconscious. He was speaking about the Lacanian unconscious. It is important to be reminded of this while rereading the passage from the seminar on the logic of fantasy:

> It is a matter of convincing people that they are quite wrong not to want to be admitted to the

> benefits of capitalism! They prefer to be rejected! [...]
>
> Perhaps there is a moment when people will come back to a sound perception of what Freud discovered for us: I am not even saying 'politics is the unconscious,' but quite simply, the 'unconscious is politics!'
>
> I mean that what binds men together, or what opposes them, is precisely justified by that whose logic we are trying for the moment to articulate. [...] This means that before noting the fact that in order to be rejected, for the 'to be rejected' to be essential as a dimension for the neurotic, the following, in any case, is essential: that he offers himself.

For psychoanalysis the following logic does not hold: that 'A = B' is homologous with 'B = A.' In the first case, the unconscious, B, is taken as a noun, which is a device, the Freudian one. So, that's 'politics is the unconscious,' or 'A = B.' But 'the unconscious is politics' makes politics the thing. The unconscious is not operative except in the field, which is the Freudian field. What Freud named 'neurosis' is perhaps another name for offering oneself up to 'symbolic castration,' even if one cannot live with its consequences. Neurosis means that one has been admitted into the benefits of the modern social bond. And that's what Freud claimed: there were benefits from this illness of civilization, the 'benefits from illness.' He often tried to convince his patients that they benefited from their illness, as seen particularly in hysterical forms of self-victimization. I would say that one of the benefits of the modern social bond was the production of sur-plus objects.

What does Lacan say about surplus jouissance in his 17th seminar? He effects a clear separation between jouissance and surplus jouissance. It is not exactly a new argument that I'm presenting: most of us already presume that surplus is a remnant of the jouissance which was lost. But I wonder if this distinction between jouissance and surplus jouissance really helps in the end? Does jouissance ever actually become lost? On the one hand the concept of surplus jouissance gives us the benefit of making a distinction in jouissance, but "jouissance as such" remains (without there being the ability to make a conceptual distinction regarding our experience of it). There was something that Lacan already mentioned in his 'ethics' seminar when jouissance was thought to be outside of the confines of the phallic-Oedipal world, accessible only through a transgression.

The psychoanalytic act was thought to consist, to put it simply, of a transgression beyond the phallic world into jouissance as such. This surplus—which should be taken to mean the 'separation that does not make a separation'—is also a recuperation of an original sur-plus into the faux-plus. Lacan says in his seminar on fantasy that when there is 'no transgression' then one falls into something 'not unlike jouissance … a surplus.' It means that when one does not go to the end, does not transgress into the psychoanalytic act, then there is perhaps the benefit of a surplus jouissance. In his earlier ethics seminar transgression was this act beyond the phallic world into jouissance as such. It was what led some to identify Antigone as a heroic revolutionary figure who transgressed.

I propose to you that Antigone was not at all a revolutionary figure of Lacanian politics. She is a revolutionary figure only from the idiotic perspective of the Freudian unconscious,

the world of phallic jouissance. It is why some circumambulate around Antigone in their phallic revolutionary sentiments. Perhaps Lacan wasn't prepared to reject the hypothesis that Antigone wasn't at all a figure of revolution but that she may have been a figure of fascism.

I wonder if the problem is that contemporary capitalism does not impose any signifier that one can find acceptable, and so, for that reason, we simply refuse to offer ourselves up to it. Perhaps our political task is to locate that signifier that would puncture a hole into the void of our contemporary discontents. Moreover, I would ask all of you, for later, the following: is capitalism a social bond based upon prohibitions? Or is it based upon weakening prohibitions? Or is it based upon affirmations of jouissance? I believe that we need to be very clear in our answer. We should refuse to remain indecisive about it. Is there a name of the father or not? Are there many names of the father? If so, how many are operative and to what degree of relative efficiency, and where? What does this tell us about global politics if there are in fact many names of the father which function to relative degrees of efficiency? Let us leave these questions open, without at all refusing to take them up each in our own way. However, for now I simply want to return to a discussion of the seminar on the logic of fantasy.

At this point in Lacan's teaching he had already advanced beyond the impasse of the phallic world. He went beyond his ethics seminar. Revolutionary sentiments were bubbling up in France and Lacan had no doubt taken notice of it through his patients. The year was 1967. Jouissance was no longer thought to be deposited into some inaccessible substratum of the phallic world. Instead, it found its way into the little hollows that in the 1970s would be taken up in

the "lathouses," in the eventual equivalence of objet petit a and surplus jouissance, and so on. Why? These bubbles of jouissance were becoming accessible to the subject rather than barred from him. The subject could now hold them in his hand, place them in his pocket, and carry them around with him (as we do now with our pocket typewriters). The transgression already happened. The world had already ended. The 'real' of jouissance bled into the social bond, eroding it, saturating the signifier that hitherto gave structure to that world. It means that the subject no longer 'benefited' from the illness of his rejection by the signifier that represented him for another signifier.

Put simply, the subject no longer offered herself up to the signifier. Consequently, sur-plus jouissance was really becoming more a jouissance of surplus, or what today I have been calling faux-plus.

4. I Dare Not Say Surplus Jouissance

When one pays the price of being admitted into the social bond through symbolic castration then one also courageously offers oneself up to the benefits of civilization and its discontents. We allow ourselves to be rejected. It is on this point that one can speak of the 'subject of politics' or the 'politics of the unconscious.' And it is what it means to be admitted into the benefits of capitalism. I remind you that Marx also spoke in his way about the 'benefits of capitalism,' and yet very few of us would consider him to be a capitalist.

We cannot say that Marx was anti-capitalist because he simply wasn't. Basically, Marx said 'we do not want to return to Feudalism!, … so capitalism is a benefit!' It even led some

philosophers called 'accelerationists' to take very seriously this acceleration of the benefits of capitalism. However, some keen commentators have noted that we have in fact returned to feudalism, into what Nick Srnicek has called 'platform capitalism.' We retreated from the benefits of capitalism. George Ritzer called this new form of capitalism 'prosumer capitalism,' which has the advantage of sounding clever. The disadvantage is that it does not demonstrate clearly that we've made much structural progress from feudalism: serfs could have also been called 'prosumers.'

What we witness is a repetition of Feudalism, its return. We can even, if we like, call the return an effect of the dialectic. But there is nonetheless a return. During this period of Lacan's teaching, which was the period of the logic of fantasy, and for several years thereafter, Lacan noticed that what was happening was that there was a leakage of jouissance into the social bond. Capitalism became liquid. Hence, some sociologists speak now about "liquid capitalism," "liquid modernity," and even the "liquid family structure." It takes liquid for there to be a saturation, and for one to require a floatation device. Lacan's idea in 1967 was that the 'benefits of capitalism' consist in the production of surplus jouissance. When there is too much liquid, we look for a floatation device, like the Freudian unconscious! Surplus jouissance can be a floatation device. And that is why the objet petit a, which was Lacan's invention, was at one time equated with the concept of surplus jouissance.

But it is also why Lacan eventually placed the objet petit a at the center of a knot that holds together, because, without that knot, the objet petit a cannot divide the subject. In "the Third," the objet petit a was described by Lacan as "that which divides the subject" as well as that which "makes a

hole in any theory whatsoever." It is quite different from the objet petit a as surplus jouissance cut by the phallic signifier, isn't it? Finally, the objet petit a becomes for Lacan, and he says so explicitly: a plug. The objet petit a is a plug inasmuch as it produces a hole, it plugs the void precisely with a hole. That's it!

Ultimately, Lacan came to realize that he was wrong in taking the position that he once did on surplus jouissance. He was wrong because he did not yet discover jouissance as such, in terms of its rigidity and fixity, demonstrated in the return of the real to its place, and its repetition along the circuitry of the drive. It means that he realized that surplus jouissance was basically still a fawning of jouissance. It can only hold for so long because the jouissance of surplus keeps gushing out. You need to plug the water. And perhaps you plug the water with water itself, working the real against itself. It's not that absurd since we know that you can freeze water into ice and then use the ice as a wall to keep the water from gushing out. Anyway, that's why jouissance is such a slippery concept: it is already a surplus, an excess, a positivity.

If we are willing to go to the end then we must nonetheless return to Freud and to politics. We must return to the subject of the unconscious. We do that because we are Lacanian, but to be Lacanian necessitates that we be willing to go to the end to discover that the end was already there at the beginning. That's what a return is, a return to the same place. Okay, I'll stop here for today.

The Separation that Doesn't Make a Separation

1. The "... and so on and so on" of the Symptom

I thought about ending our lecture series prematurely. I just wanted it to end. Yet, the sessions continue. They can go on and on and on. It reminds me of Jacques-Alain Miller's expression from his seminar on the 'one-all-alone': the et cetera of the symptom. It was there that I really learned about Lacan's equivalence of the unconscious and the symptom, making them into an ellipsis, an et cetera, or, if you like, an 'and so on and so on.' At the level of the 'and so on and so on' we can say that psychoanalysis persists. The sessions can go on and on like that, which compels me to ask if teaching can be a symptom.

A friend told me recently that when I am teaching it seems as though I have access to 'chains of signifiers circulating in the Real.' In any case, if the sessions continue then it is because there is something that continues to suffer, to 'sever.' It continues to 'sever' itself from the signifier and its field of meaning, and so on. I'll call that process the 'separation that doesn't make a separation,' otherwise referred to as 'foreclosure.' It even leads me to wonder if, when you are speeding along on the highway of 'foreclosure,' you are nonetheless forced every so often to hit a speed bump. It means that there's still hope that things can slow down a bit for us.

You'll have to endure some more rambling today because in spite of it all, it pere-severes [father-severs]. This pere-severance doesn't lead me (in particular) to turn toward my brother, as it did for Antigone with Polyneices, or even as it did for Schreber during his earlier fraternal period. When

Antigone was really in the shit, when she was confronting Creon's consternation—the moment when Creon definitely began to crumble, trembling in front of her—and even during her discussions with Ismene, wasn't she, Antigone, smiling and laughing? Honestly, it's the stuff of my nightmares.

It led Ismene to ask Antigone: 'why are you laughing at me?' And then there was the chorus: 'God hates happiness,' and specifically, we are told that God hates the happiness and the joys of war. Incidentally, I wonder why God hates happiness? Maybe it is because when man is happy he disappears from being-there. It was why the Creon of the play Antigone was the one for whom God ceased to be as an authority.

I'll return to that point momentarily. For the moment I simply want to say that Antigone was likely happy to have lost her brother because it was through his death that she instituted her faux-neg, which means that through his death she perpetuated her delusion that she was ever capable of losing him in the first place. Well, I would say that she wasn't. She couldn't lose him, and, in the end, she never did lose him—did she? Polyneices' death only perpetuated her proximity to him, intensifying it. She covered him with sand only to preserve him: preserve-rance.

Creon's law couldn't separate Antigone from her brother. In the end, he wasn't a signifier to which she thought worthy of offering herself up to. She even said it explicitly: "Creon is not enough to stand in my way!" Here, she exemplified a 'separation that doesn't make a separation.' Did somebody say totalitarianism? Would you believe it if I told you that it was Slavoj Zizek who flirted with this idea of Antigone's so-called 'totalitarianism?' He claimed that she was an

exemplary case of 'toxic masculinity,' and that, and this is striking, she was 'proto-totalitarian.' This is the point he arrived at with Alenka Zupancic. He claimed that the two of them discovered that "Antigone was a man, and Eichmann was a woman!" I believe that he did not go far enough with this thinking. Antigone shouldn't be understood in this dimension of 'toxic masculinity' but rather in the dimension of 'toxic positivity,' about which I lectured last week. What she herself portrayed as her betrayal of the law was in fact nothing but a faux-neg of the law. It was a resolutely positive rebellion against an impotent law. It is nonetheless curious that when Slavoj claimed that Antigone was 'toxic' he did not also say at that time that Creon was totalitarian or tyrannical. He seemed to reserve that designation for Antigone.

You know, Antigone was obviously stubborn. She was incapable of engaging in serious dialogue or debate. You couldn't reason with her, and she frequently chose silence. She refused to lie, always telling the truth without hiding it. These features should be noticed by anyone attentive within psychoanalytic circles. But is that enough for us to claim that she is a fascist? I wouldn't say so. But there is something here that is nonetheless worth exploring further.

Let's take a short detour so that I can make a few remarks about Antigone's real love. When I say her real love, I am not referring to the intensity of her love for her brother. I am referring to Haemon's love for Antigone. I'd like to see a book written about the revolutionary politics of Haemon. Forget about Antigone; Haemon's politics, that would be a theme worth exploring. Haemon is at the center of the Sophoclean tragedy, yet he is not in the title and hardly mentioned by commentators, specifically political readers:

Antigone. The title of the play, Antigone, could have also been an ellipsis: '. . .,' or maybe it could have been called 'God . . . or worse!' We might be tempted to claim that Antigone was basically innocent because she refused to engage in any direct aggression. Okay, that's true, but didn't her actions, passive as they may have been, nonetheless lead to the suicide of several major characters, including Haemon, who was desperately in love, and even of his mother? How could we easily ignore this silent cruelty on the part of Antigone? Are we to presume that their suicides are insignificant because they were part of the ruling establishment? Are we to presume that silence always brings us closer to God, as some of the Jesuits, under Saint Ignatius, seemed to have believed?

Haemon loved Antigone deeply. He was prepared to die in defense of her, and that is exactly what he did. In that sense, he was just as stubborn as his father, Creon. He defended the indefensible. Haemon, set out to kill Creon, the king, ended up with the sword pressed in upon himself. Maybe Haemon was among those who, within the hip circles of New York City, are referred to as "simps." Haemon, the 'simp.' Haemon would have made a great title of the Sophoclean play had he demonstrated he was worthy of having a title. On the one side, for Antigone, then, there was the tyrannical king of Thebes, Creon, and, on the other side there was the pathetic 'simp' Haemon. You have the tyrannical father versus the deeply dedicated 'simp.' What kind of choice was that for Antigone?

In both cases, what does it matter, since, for Antigone, both are signifiers that would be rejected. The 'simp' circumambulates around Antigone, close but never accepted. The tyrannical signifier, Creon, attempts to press

the law into Antigone's soul and yet he is only witnessed from a distance for the tyrant that he was. Is there any signifier in the play that could have been acceptable for Antigone to offer herself up to?

Basically, these are the three morons: Antigone, Haemon, and Creon. They are the three morons who, in each their own way, refused to be stupid enough to allow for some idiocy. They were reduced to a function of non-dupery. We can't say that they were idiots, that they were idiotological. I don't think that they demonstrated a lack of ideology but rather a para-ideology.

In any case, let's go a bit further: what is to stop us from provisionally claiming that today's ultimate geopolitical figure of Antigone can be found in Russia? It is a topic that I've been rambling about for quite some time, long before the events unfolded in Ukraine. I won't be able to develop all of it again for you today. But I'll discuss a bit of it. Let's be honest: it is we who are really in the shit today. In addition to military escalation, there is an inflation or economic crisis, an environmental crisis, a crisis in political representation, a health or biological crisis, and so on. This is what it means to be devoured by mother nature: one crisis at a time, and yet, in some sense, they are all related to a single trauma: capitalism and science. I wouldn't say that I am unaffected by it since I am speaking today largely from experience and not from theory. You know, I may have been silent about it for the last two weeks, but after leaving Russia, during the war, I lost everything: my family, career, home, and so on. It doesn't mean that I'm not finding my way of living with this 'and so on and so on.'

I risk the provocation that Russia is an Antigoneon figure.

Let's leave that hanging for a moment in order to develop an adjacent point regarding Creon. Since, as one of you put it last week, 'what can we say about Creon?' I discovered that there is more than one Creonic position in the plays. There is the Creon from *Oedipus the King,* who recognizes, in some way, that he is implicated and therefore shares in the personal responsibility for catastrophe. He remains fairly reasonable, persuadable, making amends for his mistakes, and open to dialogue with others. This is because he views himself as an intermediary between the people and the Gods. However, in *Oedipus in Colonus* and *Antigone,* don't we begin to witness him transform into something else? Something comes undone. We can say that he suddenly became stubborn.

Creon was intent on maintaining tyrannical rule, insisting upon the cold application of the law. You can see how his expressions become more precise, shorter, more focused, and strict or principled with respect to the cold application of the law. He even suggested at points that others "talk too much." He was trying to reduce the noise of others through the function of the signifier of the law, decoupled from meaning. Minimally, we can say that there are two Creonic positions. The first was during the accusation against him in *Oedipus Rex*. Creon explains in a calm and rational manner why it is that he does not want to become the king, and he openly explores the arguments and evidence with Oedipus. In the second case, Creon transformed into something like an actual father, identifying with the position of the father-king: taking total responsibility for administering the law, and thereby forming himself into a signifier. In doing so, he realized that there was a stubborn one, Antigone, who would not offer herself up to the signifier. Antigone thereby

effectuated 'a separation from the separation of the signifier,' a separation from Creon's law, the law of the father, which would have, in the second case, produced a separation of Antigone from her brother. For that second separation to occur she would have had to have offered herself up to Creon's law. She didn't therefore benefit from the separation.

What about Russia? I believe that it is necessary for us to read what Russian officials and state-affiliated intellectuals say or write about themselves. It is important to guard against presuppositions, which is not easy. Here, I would remind you of a statement from Hegel, one that I will return to in a moment, that 'the mysteries of the Egyptians were mysteries to the Egyptians themselves.' I am convinced that what we find mysterious about Russia is a mystery to the Russians—the Kremlin—themselves. This is also the feminine position: the mysteries of femininity are mysteries to women themselves. It is one way to read Lacan's statement that 'woman is Other to herself.'

Today things are even more troubling because we are all living this mystery: we've moved from mastery to mystery. Our social bond has become mysterious. It is even why the secret society is known today as a society with secrets. It had to take that position, to highlight that position, as if it were a point of difference from what is meant by secret society. A society with secrets rather than a society that is a secret, which would only make it consistent with the profane world. So, it is an important corrective, one made by Freemasons in the last few decades. And I'll tell you: there are no secrets about Freemasons anymore except that they retain a place for secrecy within the social bond, not unlike that of the

clinic. Marie-Helene Brousse reminds us in a short piece for the Lacanian Reviews Online last year that:

> The secret is a rare thing [...] Places for the secret tend to be ever more scarce. [...] Yet the secret is one of the foundations of the possibility for peaceful society and co-existence as well as the possibility to live. [...] Psychoanalysis is one of the rare locations where the secret [...] still has a place.

This is why we shouldn't begin with presuppositions about Russia. For example, Vladislav Surkov, former Deputy Chief and advisor to Putin, said that Russia operates according to a mysterious, let's call it janus-faced, logic. It does not partake in the logic of the 'nation-state.' It operates instead according to what some have been calling the 'civilization state' model. It is an entirely different logic from the 'nation-state,' which doesn't mean that we are without recognizing its influence in the Western world. It is a stubborn, uncompromising logic that operates without deception.

It was a view that has been confirmed again this week by Alexander Dugin, a Moscow sociologist who has been a major source of intellectual inspiration for contemporary Kremlin politics. In a short and precise piece for the *European Times,* he argued that the Russian 'civilization state' is closer to the cultural logic of India, China, and so on, and he described the civilization state as a type of social bond which 'expands' and 'narrows.' I really think these words are important: 'expansion' and 'narrowing,' like a bubble can be bigger or smaller . . . or maybe a balloon. The social bond can become more inflated or less inflated depending upon how much wind you let in.

[laughter]

That's what gives the balloon a larger surface area: a lot of wind. There can be 'dilation' and 'contraction' of the social bond, but this is also possible of a hole, since physics reveals that black holes dilate and contract as well.

2. Expansion and Contraction

Why not, since I mentioned earlier about how one of you made a remark about my teaching: we can admit also that pupils dilate and contract. It is a way of learning today: expansion and contraction.

Anyway, this highlights a logic that is different from the 'international' model of solidarity that has hitherto characterized Western nation-states (as indicated by the League of Nations, or the United Nations). It is there in the model of the European Union, and even in the movement of NATO. I do not think that the problem is ultimately that NATO and Russia are confronting one another but rather that we don't know how to sort out the difference between typewriters and balloons.

I'm thinking . . I'm really not prepared today . . . that there was this wonderful play about the balloon written up on Samuel Beckett's typewriter. Well, it was about the lungs, the breath, and the way they inflate with air and then deflate, in a play titled 'breath.' I'm even less of a Beckett scholar than a Scholar of Sophocles, or even than a Scholar per se, so forgive me, but the play involves something about the expansion and contraction of the lungs. And what is striking is that there is no language there, except for this 'scream.'

Anyway, I'm digressing too much, let me return to the thread: Western nations don't see themselves as partaking in the logic of expansion and contraction, which isn't to say that Westerners are not airheads because they obviously are.

But it seems to me that the Western idea has been to overcome the chasm of the 'real' that separates nations through the implementation of symbolic contracts, peace treaties, trade agreements, and so on. It concerns the efficiency of the symbolic, of the signifier. And it led Kant to defend a notion of 'perpetual peace,' also placing his trust in the efficiency of the Creonic signifier. But didn't the trouble begin to show itself in 1980s America? We begin to see it clearly with Ronald Reagon: a 'surplus object' of the nation-state model bubbled out. Reagan and other American politicians named them 'rogue states' or 'out-law' states. It gave rise to another expression, the 'evil empire,' and then, under George W. Bush, in a different context and to refer to a different cultural and territorial configuration, emerged the 'axes of evil.' These bubbles circulated until a new phrase was introduced in the last decade, a phrase that is now becoming more popular, especially in the field of international relations: 'civilization state' or 'state civilization.' When I first heard this word two years ago from a friend and sociologist in Victoria, Canada, I spent a week studying the literature deeply. I could sense that there was something of profound importance regarding the concept.

In any case, the 'rogue state' classification was resisted by those countries who were described as such. However, the 'civilization state' is different because it is largely used as a self-declaration rather than an imposed designation by another antagonistic discourse. It is more autonomous, which means that Western nations really don't use the

expression, although they are slowly coming around to it. Donald Trump, for his part, tried to return us to the discourse of the 'rogue state' during his presidential term. That makes him nostalgic, stuck in the 1980s. Civilization states are self-designations, one identifies with the surplus completely, instead of merely being designated as such in relation to the law of the West.

What can we say? Can we say that the 'rogue state' is a faux-neg of Western civilization? That means that the concept of the civilization state, which is taken up by India, Russia, and China today, demonstrates precisely that the 'rogue state' was always a faux-neg. In the end, civilization is resolutely positive. It is an out-law to the extent that it is a separation that doesn't make a separation from the nation-state. Hence, civilization, as such, is even more outlaw than the faux-neg of the law itself. What the 'civilization state' shows us is that the 'faux-neg' of Western civilization inevitably confronts a flooding. How does the 'civilization state,' with Russia as our key example, function? Well, it dilates and contracts, remains stubborn, ultimately resistant to symbolic contracts, trade agreements, and international dialogue. It remains unafraid of the consequences of its stubborn position because, unlike America, it has already experienced the death of the nation-state model: but civilization remains. It makes Russia a lonely figure, a monster with a volatile identity.

That is exactly what Surkov openly stated about Russia during his tenure as Kremlin spokesperson. You'd never hear any representative of a Western nation openly state that their nation is a lonely monster with a volatile identity, which doesn't mean that they aren't. They wouldn't say it directly. Like, for example, is Ireland a lonely monster? They seem to

be on the cusp of recognizing themselves as such today as new screams are bubbling to the surface. Their troubles never went anywhere: they returned to the same place.

In any case, Dugin has also advanced this characterization of Russia that I'm presenting, over the course of many decades. His critique of what he calls the 'unipolarity' of the geopolitical universe means that there ought to be a 'multipolarity.' However, the first problem with his argument, as I see it, is that 'multipolarity' necessitates the perpetuation of a faux-plus. When we speak of a 'multipolar' word, it means that there is no signifier capable of quilting it all together: Creonic America doesn't do it anymore. It's a serious problem for 'civilization.' Are we to take the position of Alexander Dugin, then, or those like him, Samuel Huntington, in claiming that there is multiple or a couple irreducible cultural nodes or clusters that come into conflict with one another?

I would say that the collapse of 'unipolarity,' which already occurred, . . . it doesn't necessitate that conclusion. There is no reason to move from the collapse of 'unipolarity' toward that of 'multipolarity.' The collapse of the signifier of law does not necessarily imply the movement toward the paganistic many. The faux-plus of 'multipolarity' only postpones the traumatic confrontation that is bound to occur, if it hasn't already: a confrontation with the signifier that would put an end to the expansion of the trauma.

Civilization is without a signifier, so, there is neither unipolarity nor multipolarity. Instead, what we witness with Russia is bipolarity. Russia is a 'bipolar' civilization-state. Hence, when Dugin wrote to Indians to discuss their mutual project (their solidarity in the multipolar worldview and their shared status as civilization states) he attempted to convince

them that they were actually not to have their own truth: it is not that there is 'an American truth, a Russian truth, and an Indian truth.' Not at all! For Dugin, India must join the Eurasian project, which is a truth that stands up to the American truth. That seems to make it two truths, rather than multiple. I quote Dugin:

> A multipolar order is inconceivable without India as a fully independent pole. More than that, a multipolar order can be established and made irreversible only with India. The very fact of India joining Eurasia, and reaffirming herself as a civilization state, can convince the West that the game of hegemony is over, and enhance the possibilities of a peaceful transition.

There is something important here. This notion of an 'independent pole' is immediately and quickly overridden by Dugin when he insists that India join the Eurasian pole and maintain its status as a 'civilization state.' He misses the crucial point: civilization is not multiple, it is a hole without a signifier! So, his claim is that there are only two truths, and that is a bipolar position.

What can we say about the concept of truth as advanced here by Alexander Dugin? Are there really two truths possible? I am not convinced. Is there a truth-saying that is not reducible to the fictions of the unconscious? If we claim that truth has the structure of a fiction then it is because it confronts jouissance. It led Jacques-Alain Miller to claim the following: "if one cannot say the whole truth, then this is because there is a register of existence where truth does not apply, and this register is jouissance, that which gives satisfaction." It is in defense against the vulnerability of

truth that one positions oneself in the field of non-dupery, the one who never lies. In such cases, couldn't we claim that truth itself speaks. As Lacan said on television: "I always speak the truth." Ultimately, what never lies is jouissance—it is a lying truth. So, I suppose that I am making a distinction: there is the truth of the unconscious and then there is the truth itself speaking, that is, the jouissance-truth of the speaking-being. It even reminds me of a wonderful passage from Slavoj Zizek, which I will quote for you now:

> 'Woman' cannot relate to truth as an inherent value, she cannot tell the truth; however, truth can speak in or through her. The reversal from 'I speak the truth' to 'I, the truth, speak' occurs with a woman's identification with the truth: men tell the truth, while in woman, truth itself speaks.

I can't fully dissect this passage because we are running out of time today.

I will simply say that perhaps there is something in Dugin's statement about the two truths that is homologous to what we might presume we know about the Creonic and Antigonean truths. On the one hand, there is the erosion of a truth which functions within the coordinates of an ineffective repressive law. On the other hand, there is a truth which speaks without recourse to the law, no? However, we shouldn't presume that these are two mutually exclusive truth positions: it is precisely because jouissance can only speak the truth that Creon stages his defense. The Creonic truth has within itself, exposed during its erosion, the Antigonean truth that it denies: jouissance as such. Hence, Creon, when confronted with Antigone, says precisely this: 'the truth is hard to bear.'

3. The Discontents of Civilization

I want to return now to my thread about civilization. It seems to me that civilization has now become a term with which there can be an identification. I wouldn't say that there is discontent within civilization, but rather that civilization has itself become our discontent. We used to feel ourselves estranged within civilization, to such an extent that we might have claimed, with Marx even, that there was estrangement within our social order. However, today civilization itself has become strange.

The 'nation-state' intended to impose the law upon civilization to produce the civilized, always producing outlaws in the process. Yet, today, the 'nation-state' is in a state of collapse, and we are forced perhaps to hear Rosa Luxemburg's scream: "socialism or barbarism!" She didn't say: "civilization or barbarism," but why not? I'd like to move in a different direction for the moment: the modern civilization, with its nation-states, gave rise Freud's invention of psychoanalysis. It was a benefit from the illness of the civilization of his time. But today civilization is the source of our discontent. I quite like how Slavoj put it more than a few decades ago in his first documentary:

> 'Civilization and its discontents' means that civilization as such is pathological. We are out of touch in civilization as such, so there is no normal civilization.

I take this to mean that we are all disconnected from civilization, from the unconscious of our time. We can only speak of the multiple solutions to jouissance, to modes of

jouissance and so on., perhaps of civilization as such. It is why I want to put an end to the multiplicity and to all these discussions concerning the movement from the mode of production to the modes of jouissance. And I'll try to put an end to it today by quoting something that Lacan said in his 'The Third:' "nevertheless, all our experience is based on the discontent that Freud somewhere refers to as the discontents of civilization."

To give you a sense of why I like this statement I will quote Jacques-Alain Miller: "now is the time of civilization and its discontents, and even a little beyond: the time of civilization and its horror." We are living this horror today. How to escape the horror? Perhaps psychoanalysis can be a space of refuge against civilization. Make no mistake, the word refuge is not only a synonym for 'trash' but also for those who are displaced by war, like Polyneices, Antigone, Creon, and Haemon.

I defend the concept of the School as best as I can, like a lonely militant. Lacan said: "this term School [...] is to be taken in the sense it had in ancient times, it meant some places of refuge or bases of operation against what could already be called civilization and its discontents." The School is without any dedication to Polyneices. It is a place of refuge during the horror of civilization.

There is even something like an antinomy: psychoanalysis and civilization, or, psychoanalysis and capitalism. That is exactly what Miller said in his apparently anti-capitalist presentation which you can find in the *Newsletter of the Freudian Field,* Volume 4, Numbers 1 & 2 from the Spring / Fall edition in 1990. It is titled "A Reading of Some Details in Television in Dialogue with the Audience," which occurred at Barnard College, New York. I did not say "Bard

College," which would make this text very threatening to Russian intelligences. I said Barnard College.

In that text Miller echoed Lacan in claiming that the psychoanalyst's discourse is the only counterpoint to the discourse of mastery, but he added that it was a counterpoint to what I am now calling the flooding of civilization. And in his psychoanalytic manifesto—which is not the sort of manifesto you might expect to read—he claimed that "psychoanalysis shall never surrender to civilization!" It is a militant statement, in its way. It doesn't make me defend NATO or the American unipolarity. Nonetheless, I won't surrender! This refusal to surrender doesn't imply that one denounces capitalism, as in the case of a political anti-capitalism. Lacan cautioned us against this when he said: "denouncing the capitalist discourse only improves it." I quote Lacan in full:

> [I]n relating this misery of the discourse of the capitalist, I denounce the latter. Only here, I point out in all seriousness that I cannot do this, because in denouncing it I reinforce it—by normalizing it, that is, improving it.

I don't know what else there is to say.

We are really in the flood today. It is the flooding, the faux-neg, which comes from the reign of the signified. The rain of the signified. I wouldn't say that I want to burn the books. They are too wet. I'll end with this quote from Miller: "what we call the unconscious is a signifier that is waiting for a signified."

Letter to Alexandr Dugin[6]

Dear Alexandr,

Yes, I believe that I follow your point. I wonder for how long I might be able to capture your attention with what it is that I'm going to write to you now.

Doesn't Lacan do something that is mysterious and yet prophetic in his last teaching? It is clear: he has zero nostalgia for societies structured around the father. Goodbye fathers! The father, understood as the lynchpin of a social bond, never quite had the reach that anyone ever thought it did. This is why the truth of the father, in Lacan's discourse theory, which you've cited in your work quite accurately, is the father's castration: $. In other words, the father has a limit, is limited by his reach.

Did we not also see this in Freud? There was always a zone foreclosed to the father's law (i.e., the "navel" of the dream, and, at a later point, a side of the symptom, and so on). It is what made analysis interminable, in a way.

And so why shouldn't we witness this also in geopolitics today? First, we saw the rogue state, and then the axis of evil, and finally, in an upsurge, the so-called evil empire. These are not my names—these are other names from the father. This place where the principle of the law, which would supposedly cohere our differences, erodes and the singular rises to the zenith as a dominant social principle. It is only on this basis

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[6] Letter dated October 2024, the last correspondence with Alexandr Dugin.

that Huntington's thesis can be sustained, in all its incredible rigor and accuracy.

Okay, but can we go further still?

In the late teaching, Lacan says something else: one can do without the father. It is a multipolar vision, isn't it? He moves from the "name of the father"—you do not have the Russian definite article, "the," but I hope you can follow it anyway—toward the "names" of the father (plural). He says it plainly: "there are many names of the father."

This was the beginning of his heresy to the church of the father. This is a nice word, heresy, because in French it sounds like "R-S-I," the three orders of the Borromean knot, which you know quite well, but arranged properly, beginning with the Real. At this point, within the life of Lacan's teaching, you do have something to catch onto with your multipolar vision. It is true—there are many names of the father, across civilizations and at whatever scale. It could be a woman, a religion, a cultural history, a cell phone, a drug, whatever. Why couldn't the Russian truth be found also in the dark corners of Dostoyevsky, as you say, a father even for him—why not?

Except this is not how I read Dostoyevsky, personally. Nor one James Joyce, who also moved Lacan toward his final paradigm.

So, what is the final paradigm. Lacan said it clearly: "one can do without the father." Heresy! I want to convince you to visit this paradigm of Lacan's teaching. How does one do without the father? He begins with the seminar ". . . Or Worse," which in French sounds the same as "father." He says that when one gets rid of the father, he returns in the real, and often in a terrible way. Imagine the father returning

in the look of Putin in Biden's eyes. This is a return of the real, reflecting monstrosity back on oneself in the gaze of the Other. It says more about oneself rather than the other, doesn't it? I think even Putin came around to this point of view, which I made long before him: "what Biden saw was his own soul reflected back at him." It was just a few weeks after I made this statement that Putin himself made it and the media captured it.

Thank you for following me this far in my argument. You get the sense that the father is something to be achieved, even if it is for each "one" and not for "all." It is a question of singularity, and of how singularities, in the plural, can hold themselves together. These little snowflakes that now populate American campuses—how do they relate to those who are not snowflakes but maple leaves? One is a snowflake and another a maple leaf—how to relate? The multipolarity thesis hits a limit here. It is the limit of how to sustain oneself against the other's mode of being or existence (forgive my lack of philosophical precision, being and existence … two different matters, even for Lacan).

In any case, at this point, nobody quite knows what to do: it is a question of threats to the singularity's very existence. Suddenly, around the world, especially in the West, you see the Russian truth: my very existence is under threat from the Other. In his *Ecrits,* Lacan called this 'c factor.' In the pure difference of civilizations, or social orders, how to get along with this? It is a question of how to live with the other's unbearable existence. Sartre once said it correctly, but for the wrong reason: hell is other people. The multipolar vision confronts limits.

I remind you of an old psychoanalytic joke:

> A man goes to see his psychoanalyst and complains that he is a piece of corn: 'Help me, Doctor, I believe I am a piece of corn and a giant chicken is trying to eat me!'
>
> The man seeks analysis for three years and suddenly, he is cured. But then two months pass, and he returns: 'Doctor, help me, help me!'
>
> The analyst replies: 'but you are cured, you no longer believe yourself to be a piece of corn!'
>
> The man replies: 'I know that idiot, but the chicken doesn't know it!'

Are we not in this situation?: the empire of truth and the empire of lies, the latter not knowing that the piece of corn is not a piece of corn. It does not make truth any more appealing to me. As Lacan said, "you'd have to have the devil in you to believe that truth is beneficial."

Duane